

sojourners

A close-up photograph of two young girls of African descent. The girl in the foreground is smiling and looking towards the camera, wearing a white shirt with pink and white striped sleeves. The girl behind her is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression, wearing a blue and white striped shirt. They are both holding a small pink object between their hands. The background is a textured blue wall.

February 2015 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

HAITI

**Five years after
the quake**

PLUS:

**Edwidge Danticat:
Blessed are those who mourn**

**Raising boys into strong
and vulnerable men**

**Bad theology and
domestic violence**





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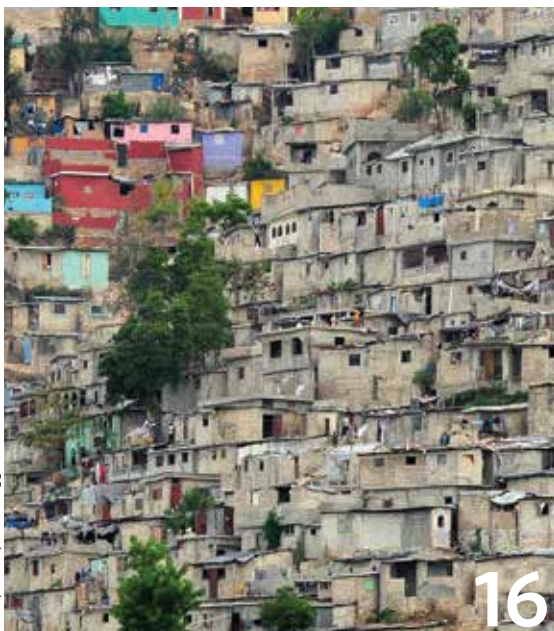
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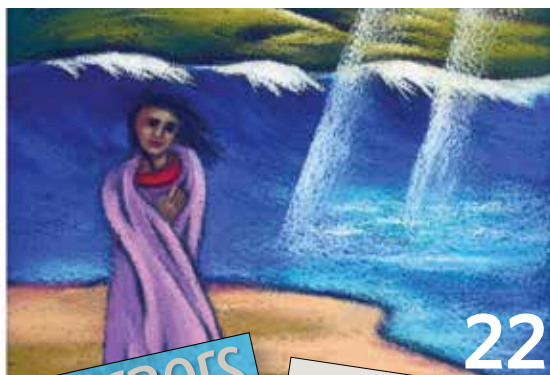
Spiritual renewal will only happen when "local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society."

– Lesslie Newbigin

cover photo by Chuck Bigger



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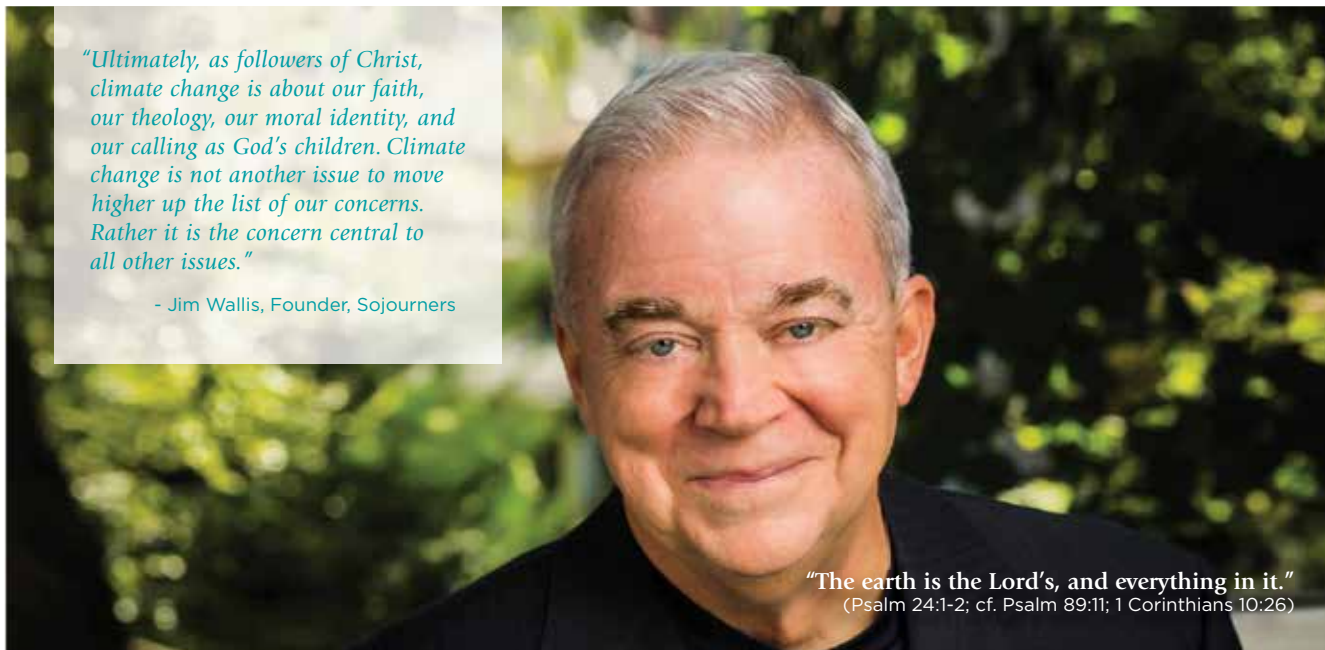
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ANSWER THE CALL TO CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION

"Ultimately, as followers of Christ, climate change is about our faith, our theology, our moral identity, and our calling as God's children. Climate change is not another issue to move higher up the list of our concerns. Rather it is the concern central to all other issues."

- Jim Wallis, Founder, Sojourners



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(Psalm 24:1-2; cf. Psalm 89:11; 1 Corinthians 10:26)*

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Blessed Tomorrow is a program created by this council of diverse faith leaders, including Sojourners, in collaboration with ecoAmerica through its MomentUs initiative.



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FIVE YEARS AFTER the devastating earthquake that killed more than 300,000 people, Haiti is still a nation struggling to recover. Mired in poverty for generations, it needed a massive response to the disaster, and in the months immediately afterward the international community promised billions in aid. But less than 1 percent of that aid went to the public sector for rebuilding the nation's infrastructure.

In August, *Sojourners* editor Jim Rice spent a week in Haiti looking for signs of progress, or at least of hope. Amid the extreme poverty and the crumbled infrastructure, he found examples of Haitians raising their own expectations for the future in partnership with nonprofit organizations

such as Compassion International, which has worked in the country since 1968.

Before the earthquake, Compassion's primary focus in Haiti was on child development. But the disaster imposed its own reality: For children to fully develop, they need schools, and for the social fabric of local communities to recover, small businesses need support. So Compassion broadened its mission, bringing in engineers from outside the country to help the locals rebuild for their children's future. And it established a program of microloans for small enterprises, 60 percent of which went to women. The program included entrepreneurial training, along with the loans, to improve the possibility of success. Chuck

Bigger's vivid photographs in this issue convey the strength—and the challenges—of the Haitian people.

Also in this issue, in the second of our series of reflections on the Beatitudes, Haitian-born writer Edwidge Danticat explores Matthew 5:4—"blessed are those who mourn"—as she recounts the recent death of her mother and the difficulty of accepting the comfort of that mourning.

And Houston teacher Casey Fleming writes that while she's confident in bringing her passion for feminism to her ninth-grade students, she worries, while pregnant with a son, about how to raise a good male. "I ask all the good men I know, and they give me the same answer: 'He'll need a mentor.'" ■

Letters

UNDERSTANDING U.S. MUSLIMS

What an example you are! I just got my December 2014 issue in the mail today and was trying to find a story I was interested in when I came across Eboo Patel's "On Being a Muslim Parent" in his "Bridges" column. I just heard him speak at Chapman University last week on interfaith dialogue in the 21st century, and he was excellent! You are doing the Lord's work by having him in this issue, helping us all see what Christians and Muslims have in common, and the struggles that U.S. Muslims often face. I commend you.

Carol Turpen

Garden Grove, California

ACADEMICS OVER SPORTS

One could ask if Danny Duncan Collum's "Paying to Play" (December 2014) might prompt another proposal: Eliminate interscholastic school sports entirely and provide lots of intramural sports at schools or at the Y, an organization providing sports opportunities for kids of all ages.

This could help lead to the following: 1) Help students and parents focus more on academic and personal growth. In a day when lots of people are complaining about the lack of focus on academic achievement and on the high costs of public education, no one seems willing to discuss the

distraction from academic achievement. 2) Focus tax support for schools more specifically on academic learning and greatly reduce the amount of tax money allotted to costs, evident or hidden, of the huge high school sports machine in action. 3) Foster a purer pursuit of sports as recreation for as many students as possible—for its fitness and interpersonal development values. 4) Avoid the one-sport-all-year-long standard that has taken over many schools, to the "satisfaction" of coaches but the detriment of students, who would benefit from a wider variety of sports opportunities. 5) Open up more fully to participation in "travel team" sports for particularly skilled youngsters, providing monetary support for those who cannot pay the usual cost—a model already existing in certain places in Europe. 6) Provide some of the leftover time for more students to engage in the arts, debate, journalism, and academic clubs. This enrichment would better serve students who presently try to focus on one sport all year long to the exclusion of a wide variety of gainful pursuits, often with little actual playing time.

The U.S. should take a good, long look at how some European countries foster sports outside of basic education, and generally do not involve higher education at all in intercollegiate sports, all to a greater enrichment

of their culture and, in many cases, to higher academic achievement.

Karl E. Moyer

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

GREATER INTERFAITH INCLUSION

Thank you for Rabbi Seth Goren's good article "Recognizing 'Christian Privilege'" (July 2013). I am active in interfaith work and am currently doing a master's degree course at Claremont Lincoln University in Claremont, Calif. I had the chance to read Rabbi Goren's article as part of my suggested reading for a "Power and Privilege" course.

In future issues, I hope you add a symbol of the Zarathushti (Zoroastrian) religion, one of the oldest known monotheistic religions. It was the majority religion of three Persian empires for more than 1,000 years, from the time of Cyrus the Great—the ruler who liberated the Jews from captivity in Babylon. Cyrus the Great pledged money for the Jews to rebuild their temple in their homeland and is the only non-Jew mentioned as the "anointed one" in the Old Testament.

Maneck Bhujwala

Huntington Beach, California

"On the other hand ..." Write to letters@soj.net or Letters, Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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BY JIM WALLIS

'We Were Strangers Once, Too'



IF YOU'VE been following Sojourners' work for the past few years, you know that we have been deeply involved in efforts to reform our nation's broken immigration system. In the wake of President Obama's game-changing executive actions in November and the political firestorm they ignited, it's appropriate for us to reflect on how we got to where we are today and where we might go from here.

After the 2012 elections, it seemed all but certain that we would see comprehensive immigration reform become law during the 113th Congress. The electorate in 2012 had a higher percentage of Latino voters than ever before, in keeping with our country's changing demographics. The mandate seemed clear for polit-

the gospel of Matthew, Jesus offers a vision in which caring for them is the defining mark of God's kingdom: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:35-36).

This text from Matthew was instrumental in my conversion to Christian faith. And it has converted millions of Christians to support immigration reform.

Over the past few years, Sojourners has worked to raise the voices of these Christians. In doing so, we have played an important role in coalitions whose breadth and diversity is unprecedented in the history of this issue. To give just two examples: We came together with a number of key evangelical organizations and leaders to form the Evangelical Immigration Table, a broad coalition advocating for immigration reform consistent with biblical values. We have also worked closely with the National Immigration Forum's Bibles, Badges, and Business network, which brings together faith leaders, law enforcement officials, and business leaders to advocate for reform—three important constituencies for Republicans in particular. And this is just scratching the surface of Sojourners' work on this issue.

Unfortunately, despite the hard work and powerful witness of people and organizations from all political persuasions, religious beliefs, and walks of life in favor of comprehensive reform, Congress did not pass a bill. Politics triumphed over people. The Senate passed a bipartisan bill for comprehensive reform in June 2013. But Republican leaders in the House of

Representatives gave in to the most extreme anti-immigration elements of their party and refused to bring the bill to the floor. This is all the more tragic given that the Senate bill, if put before the House for a vote, would almost certainly have passed with bipartisan support.

And so, more than 500 days after the Senate bill passed, President Obama used his executive authority to bring some relief to those suffering the most under our broken system—immigrant families living under the constant threat of separation through deportation. In the absence of a new and better immigration system, which only Congress can provide, the president is working within the constraints of the system we have now to treat the "strangers" among us more humanely. Paraphrasing the passage from Exodus I quoted above, he told Americans to remember that "we were strangers once, too." In response the Republicans, newly emboldened after winning the November midterms, vowed to do everything in their power to stop the president's actions.

So that's where we are now. But where might we go from here? As I said, only Congress can ultimately reform our broken system, so it is to Congress that we must continue to direct our witness and our voices. I believe there is still majority support for comprehensive immigration reform in both the House and the Senate. But in order for a bill to pass, congressional leaders on both sides must be convinced to put people above party. I believe this can happen if we keep growing and broadening our coalition and never give up fighting for the people among us who so desperately need our help. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

Congressional leaders on both sides must be convinced to put people above party.

ical leaders on both sides of the aisle to prioritize immigration reform or risk alienating a constituency vital to winning future elections.

Beyond this narrow political calculus, however, many of us became deeply involved in the struggle for immigration reform because we strongly believe that fixing our broken immigration system is a *moral* imperative, and long overdue. Our faith as Christians compels us to struggle for a more humane immigration system. Indeed, the scriptures could not be clearer. In the Old Testament, the Lord commands: "Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9).

In the New Testament, the stranger and all who are vulnerable are at the very heart of the gospel. In

John Moore/Getty Images



Life After Ebola

In Liberia, Ebola survivors Mark Jerry (right) and Zaizay Mulbah prepare for their shifts as nurse's assistants at the Doctors Without Borders Ebola treatment center in Paynesville. In Monrovia, members of a survivors association are caring for some of the country's more than 2,000 "Ebola orphans" at a home in a converted juvenile detention center. "We are the victims," said Konah Kupee, a worker at the orphanage. "We are the best people to take care of the children." Ebola kills about 70 percent of the people it infects, but it leaves survivors immune to the strain that sickened them.

By Tara Culp-Ressler

Obamacare Marches On, Step by Step

Despite continued opposition, the ACA is accomplishing its goals.

THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT, which has now been the law of the land for five years, is beginning to reshape the national landscape in significant ways.

According to a *New York Times* analysis of the ACA's first enrollment period, about 10 million additional people gained insurance in 2014. Many of them fall into demographic groups that have historically struggled to access coverage, such as low-income Americans, people of color, and women. Ultimately, President Obama's health law is slowly making the country more equal.

There are a few ways the ACA is accomplishing that goal. It has built-in consumer protections to ensure that insurance companies treat people more fairly. It's created state-level marketplaces to give people new options for purchasing private plans. And it's expanded the pool of people who are eligible for public coverage through the Medicaid program.

Health policy experts agree that adding

more low-income people to the Medicaid rolls represents one of the biggest successes of the ACA so far. According to the Urban Institute, a nonprofit research group, the states that agreed to expand their Medicaid programs—27 so far, plus the District of Columbia—have seen about a 40 percent drop in their uninsured rates.

"This has been a lifesaver for me. I hadn't seen a doctor for 11 years," Marc Sigoloff, a freelance writer in Illinois, told me. Sigoloff signed up for Medicaid and subsequently discovered he had a brain tumor.

Carol Fisher Hardaway is now covered through Maryland's Medicaid program. She told me she has a newfound peace of mind since she doesn't need to worry about affording the treatment for her multiple sclerosis. Her reduced stress, in fact, is quantifiable. When we talked in October, she had just found out her blood pressure was at a healthy level for the first time in nearly 15 years.

"I sat in the parking lot and cried," she said. "I'm so blessed, and obviously my body is grateful. I'm grateful I'm able to benefit from it."

But not everyone shares Sigoloff and Fisher Hardaway's gratitude. After the health-care reform law was passed, the Supreme Court ruled that its Medicaid expansion provision should be optional. That ruling allowed anti-ACA states to block this particular piece of the law—stranding an estimated 4 million Americans in a "coverage gap," according to a Kaiser Family Foundation researcher.

Over the past year, faith leaders in states from Missouri to Ohio to Tennessee have raised Medicaid expansion as a moral issue, arguing that it is the moral responsibility of lawmakers to protect their most vulnerable citizens.

"History has not been kind to governors who stand in front of schoolhouse doors because the children are not the right kind of children, and history will not be kind to

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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governors who stand in front of hospital doors and clinics because people who are trying to get in are deemed politically dispensable," Rev. Raphael Warnock, senior pastor at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church, told reporters in May.

Nonetheless, the Medicaid expansion situation remains largely unchanged. Although health-care advocates hoped the midterm elections might usher in more government leaders who support the Medicaid

expansion, that wasn't the case.

As long as states resist expansion, the ACA won't fully accomplish its goal of extending coverage to the people who can't currently afford it. And we will only be able to see the full effect of the law in about half of the country—no matter how many years pass under Obamacare. ■

Tara Culp-Ressler is health editor for Think Progress in Washington, D.C.

By Juliet Vedral

Nothing Religious About It

Central African Republic faith leaders say war is not perpetrated in God's name.

SINCE WAR BROKE out in the Central African Republic in March 2013, the international community has referred to it as a "religious conflict." When the media cover the violence at all, they usually frame it as a story of Muslims against Christians. However, to call this conflict a war of religion is simplistic at best and a smokescreen for the real causes at worst.

That is the message that Central African Republic (CAR) faith leaders—Catholic,

been telling our believers that they should go out and kill Muslims, and the imam has never been telling his followers that they should go out and kill Christians."

In 2013, Seleka, a group of militants predominantly identified as Muslim, overturned the government, causing widespread chaos and violence. In retaliation, anti-Balaka, a group of militants predominantly identified as Christians and animists, waged its own unspeakable violence. These are distortions,

"We're losing an entire generation of kids who are being groomed to become rebels."

evangelical, and Muslim—have worked tirelessly to spread, at great personal cost. Imam Omar Kobine Layama, president of the Central African Islamic Community, Catholic Archbishop Dieudonné Nzapalainga of Bangui, and Rev. Nicolas Guérékoyame-Gbangou, president of the Evangelical Alliance of the Central African Republic, have been at the forefront of their country's peace and reconciliation movement.

During a November 2014 interview in Washington, D.C., Archbishop Nzapalainga adamantly refuted the "religious war" narrative.

"Our role is to continually remind our religious believers ... that those people who want to kill people or rape people ... are in contradiction with their faith," he told *Sojourners*. "We, for example, have never

said the religious leaders. "People have used religion as a pretext, a cover for their ambitions of power," the leaders wrote in a *Time* commentary.

The larger causes of economic and political insecurity are ignored when the focus is put solely on religion. The Central African Republic ranks 185 out of 187 in the United Nation's human development index, despite its wealth of natural resources. According to Guérékoyame-Gbangou, there are only 20 registered businesses in his country. This economic instability is underscored by the government's lack of resources, limited capacity, and limited authority over many regions of the country. Lack of economic opportunity and the struggling government create an environment where joining a militia is an attractive option for young men who can't find work. Additionally, schools are no

From the Archives

February 1989

Common Security

[A] POPULAR

consensus is forming around the fact that new world realities demand fresh policies, beyond militarism. Public opinion is increasingly sophisticated about military and foreign policy issues. This is in large part due to the efforts of the peace movement.



A significant share of the peace movement's task is to promote political literacy in our own country. Every town meeting organized, every opportunity arranged for people to make their own judgments and come to their own decisions about U.S. foreign and military policy is an investment in future social and political change. As people are confronted with these moments of decision, they are given the information, the tools, the sense of their own power to determine the shape of national security policies.

Washington is the place where decisions are made. It is not, however, the place where all the power is or where the most effective campaigns are always fought and won. The real political battle is between those who innovate and introduce ideas, intending to set the foreign and military policy agenda. ...

Common security is both a new way of thinking about the conduct of international relations and a political program. ... The challenge now is to convince cynical politicians that the public is ready for a principled and common-sense approach to foreign policy. ■

Pam Solo was co-director of the Institute for Peace and International Security in Cambridge, Mass., when this article appeared.

longer in session, which further exacerbates instability.

"We're actually losing—sacrificing—an entire generation of kids who are instead being prepared, being groomed if you will, to become rebels or bandits," said Layama.

Some people are perpetrating violence "in God's name." Many more people of faith, however, bring peace and promote dialogue between the different groups. For example, in certain neighborhoods in the capital city of Bangui, Christians have sheltered and protected their Muslim neighbors. Some young Christians and Muslims have started to pray together. Layama said he sees "a lot of people who are coming together, who are eating

together, working together, and playing together. This is how they are together going to dream a better future for our country."

Faith must be a force for reconciliation. These three leaders hope that people of faith around the world will pray together with the people of the Central African Republic. When the peace leaders are people of faith, then the smokescreen begins to lift and the conflict's real causes can be exposed to the light. ■

Juliet Vedral is press secretary at Sojourners. She met with the delegation from the Central African Republic in Washington, D.C., in November 2014.

By Sue Lefebvre

Operation Railroad

Mass prosecution of immigrants undercuts efforts against border violence.

IN OCTOBER 2013, an ad hoc group of humanitarians in Tucson, Ariz., chained themselves under buses scheduled to bring undocumented immigrants to trial at the federal district courthouse. The protests were aimed at Operation Streamline, which requires federal criminal charges to be brought against every person accused of an illegal border crossing. The action halted, for one day, Operation Streamline's en masse prosecution of groups ranging from 50 to 100 people.

Under Operation Streamline, implemented under the Bush administration, deportation cases shifted from civil immigration authorities to federal criminal courts, a move that forced undocumented immigrants into the federal criminal justice system and into U.S. prisons. Operation Streamline is undergirded by a 2005 Customs and Border Patrol program called the Consequence Delivery System (CDS), which "guides management and agents through a process designed to uniquely evaluate *each subject* and identify the ideal consequence to break the smuggling cycle." Using CDS, a first border-crossing offense is treated as a misdemeanor, punishable by up to six months in prison. Those who are caught a second time face deportation and possible felony convictions punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

Prior to CDS, border crossers without

proper documentation were rarely prosecuted as criminals; instead, they were "administratively deported" through the civil immigration system. Under fast-track programs such as Operation Streamline, a federal criminal case—with prison and deportation consequences—can be completed in two days or less.

Operation Streamline began in Texas. Now it's the practice in eight of the 11 federal jurisdictions. When the program started in Arizona in 2008, local humanitarians began visiting the federal court each afternoon to support those charged with illegal immigration. The several dozen prisoners—unwashed, with hands and feet shackled—were terrified of what would happen next. The prisoners spent 30 minutes or less with a court-appointed attorney—not enough time to explore the facts of the case, determine eligibility for asylum or other visa opportunities, or even authenticate country of origin, which in some cases was the U.S.

"The program's voluminous prosecutions have forced many courts to cut procedural corners," reports UC Berkeley's Warren Institute. "Magistrate judges conduct en masse hearings, during which as many as 80 defendants plead guilty at a time." Misuse of the federal criminal justice system and civil rights violations have been so excessive in

these cases that the American Civil Liberties Union took Operation Streamline to court. In December 2009, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit held that Streamline's en masse plea hearings in Tucson violate federal law. The Warren Institute determined that Operation Streamline actually diverts attention away from fighting drug smuggling,

Operation Streamline keeps prosecutors from focusing on the most egregious crimes.

human trafficking, and other crimes that create border violence.

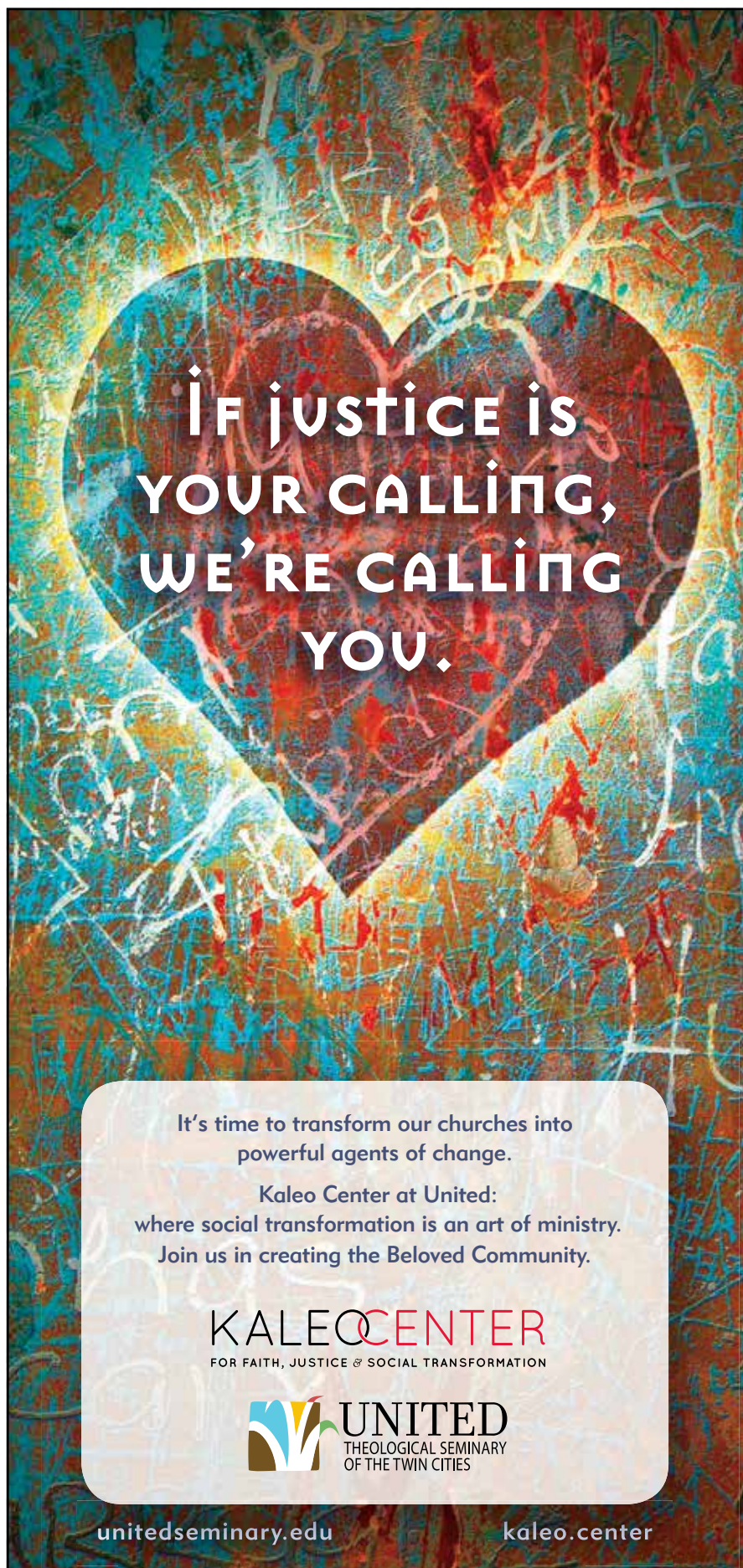
Unfortunately, the ruling is not binding outside of the Ninth Circuit, and the program continues in Tucson with only a few modifications.

Sixteen of the demonstrators arrested in 2013 as part of the End Streamline Coalition are scheduled to stand trial in March. Their actions have raised public awareness about Operation Streamline. But what else can be done?

We can demand that the Obama administration restore prosecutorial discretion to the U.S. attorneys whose job it is to prosecute in a way that prevents border violence. According to the Warren Institute, Operation Streamline denies prosecutors "prosecutorial discretion," a feature that allows them to focus on the most egregious crimes.

President Obama's executive action in November to reform immigration laws is premised on the right to exercise prosecutorial discretion. While Obama's action focused on undocumented persons who have lived in the U.S. for an extended period of time, it will require revisiting Operation Streamline to ensure that no one in the "protected categories" gets swept up in the wrong net. This provides an opportunity to expand our review of Operation Streamline's policies and practices. Otherwise, for thousands of detainees, it'll continue to be Operation Railroad. ■

Sue Lefebvre worked for seven years in Tucson, Ariz., with the humanitarian group No More Deaths, dealing with border issues. She now lives in Phoenix.



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People Get Ready

JEN BAILEY PAYS attention. She recognized the paucity of healthy food choices in Nashville's "food desert" areas and designed an interfaith toolkit to enhance the skills of food-justice organizers tackling that issue. Jen—now Rev. Bailey of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—listened to the recurring theme in her own lived experience: Faith communities can be a catalyzing source for good and are even more powerful when they work together. Bailey hasn't yet hit 30.

Millennials have gotten serious press this year from Pew, NPR, The Huffington Post, *The Atlantic*, and the like. Amid their diversity, these roughly 80 million people appear to share several common traits. They are global citizens who want to act and impact locally, who crave meaning, seek entrepreneurialism,



Faith Matters Network founder Jen Bailey

FMN photo

faith "collaboratories" and transformational storytelling. The first is a new form of gathering "communities of praxis" to work together to tackle local challenges. The second recognizes the power of story to connect us, one to another, and to get people to pay attention.

Why try to understand a complex problem such as economic injustice? For Bailey, it's Jesus and the hope that comes in the gospel. The U.S., one of the wealthiest nations in the world, has a 14.5 percent poverty rate, with 45.3 million people and one in five children living in poverty. In the face of this ugliness, Bailey is buoyed by the gospel's teaching that God is on the side of the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized. Of the world's highly developed countries, the U.S. has the largest income inequality, and the poor are disproportionately affected by global problems such as climate change and national challenges such as access to quality education.

Recognizing this systemic failure, Bailey recalls the stories of the church mothers about "making a way out of no way." FMN places economic and climate justice at the core of its mission and calls for a faith-led revolution to tackle these problems at the local level.

Consumer-product analysts

want to know how millennials spend their money. City planners want to make their locales attractive to a young, mobile population. Faith and civic communities are paying attention to inspired and capable young people such as Bailey because they're powerful and they're looking to collaborate. The FMN is the product of Bailey's fellowship with the Nathan Cummings Foundation; philanthropists are paying attention, too.

The song "People Get Ready" was inspired by the 1965 March on Washington and reflects Curtis Mayfield's experience of growing up in a Chicago church. Two years before, 34-year-old Martin Luther King Jr. had penned this in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," a quote prominent on the "What We Do" section of the FMN website. The interfaith movement is rooted, inspired, and "glocal," and we would all do well to pay attention to millennials such as Rev. Jen Bailey who are leading the way. ■

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American of Indian heritage. Becca Hartman-Pickerill manages the executive office at Interfaith Youth Core.

If Jen Bailey is emblematic of her generation in any way, we have a lot to be hopeful about.

prioritize people and networks over institutions, and often profess different parameters of and pathways to success than previous generations. If Bailey is emblematic of her generation in any way, we have a lot to be hopeful about.

This year, Bailey started the Faith Matters Network (FMN), a "multi-faith alliance dedicated to building the power of people of faith to transform our social and economic systems." The group focuses on the South and Midwest because both areas are significantly impacted by economic inequality and are highly religious. That is, there is a lot of work to be done and lots of people (theoretically) committed to doing it.

In addition to connecting folks with resources and partner organizations, FMN has two main programs:



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Students Taylor Dwyer-Zeman (far left) and Sandra Stevens (blue scarf), and professor emeritus Ted Koontz (green jacket) protest the School of the Americas, Fort Benning, Ga.



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On a Firm Foundation

Five years after the hemisphere's most catastrophic disaster in a century, Haiti seeks to build back better.

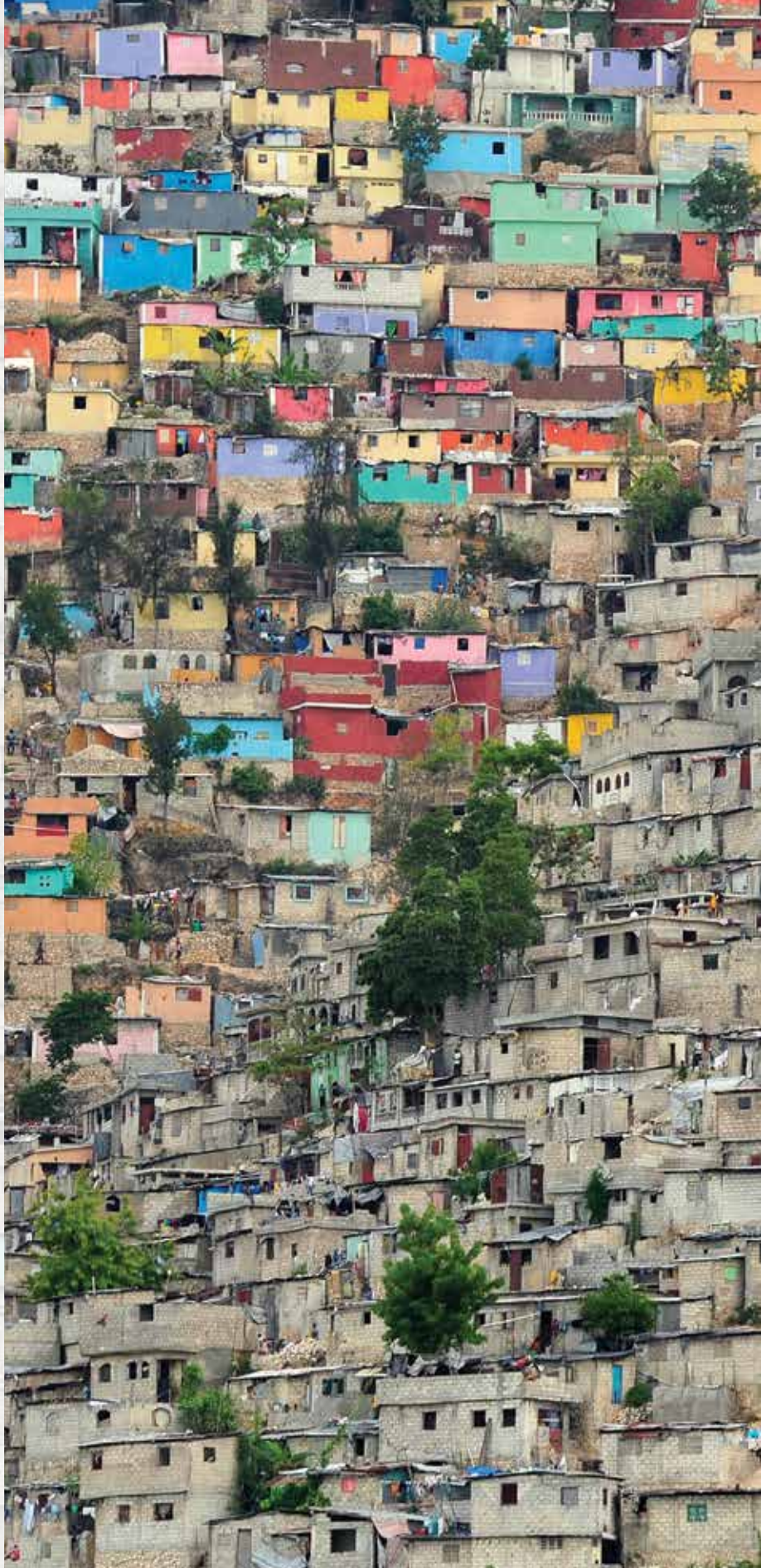
by **JIM RICE** • photos by **CHUCK BIGGER**

HILDA DE BOJORQUEZ holds a set of blueprints in one hand. Her other hand is pointing. At a better future, perhaps, if things go well.

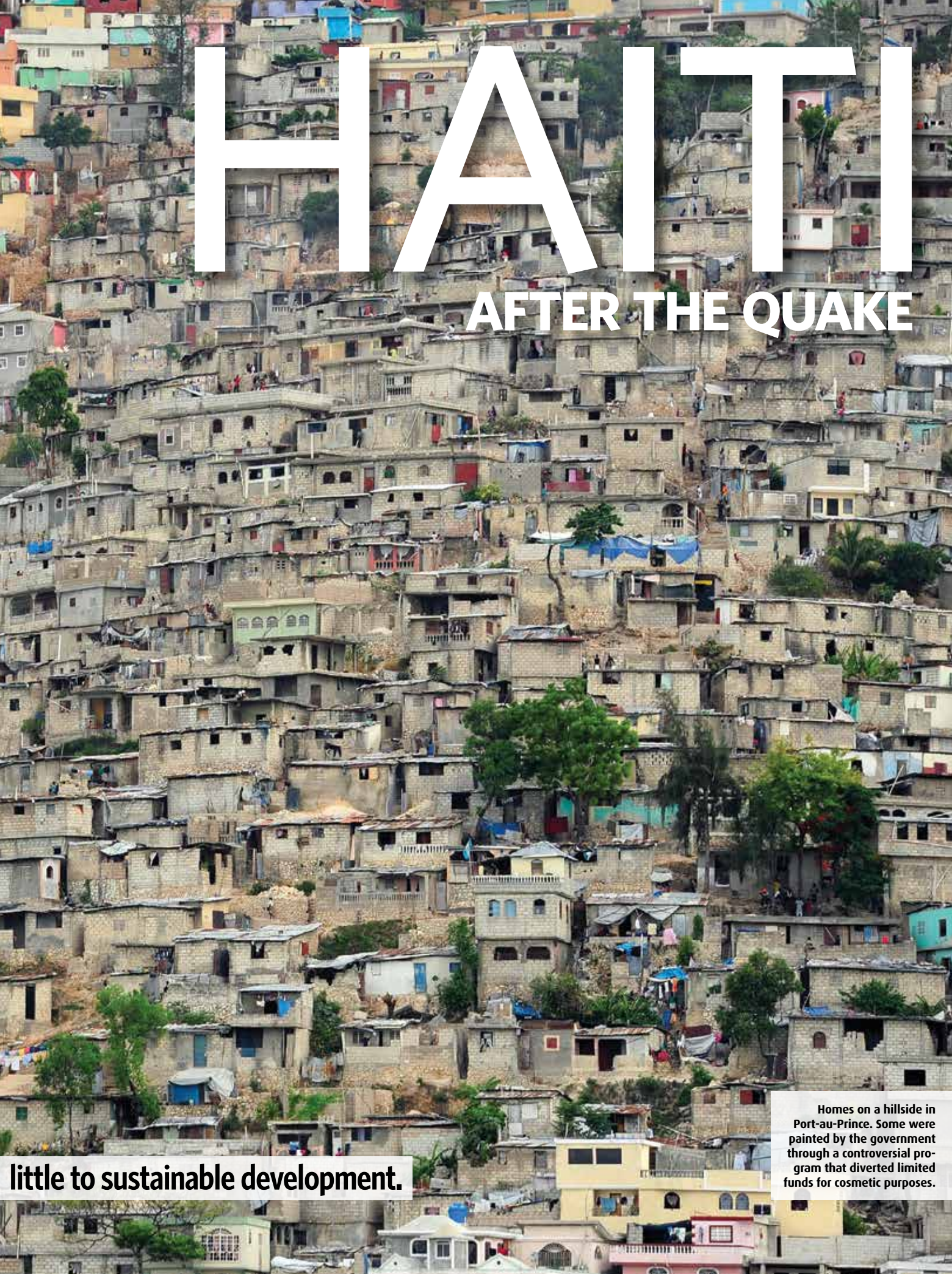
De Bojorquez is the chief engineer at this construction site in a neighborhood just outside Port-au-Prince still blemished with rubble from Haiti's 2010 earthquake. She commands respect from the all-male crew of Haitians working at the site—she tells a group of visiting U.S. reporters that her gender has never been an issue in the male-dominated world of construction, here or in her native El Salvador.

When asked about obstacles on the project, De Bojorquez goes on for 15 minutes—she's an engineer, after all—but the point is that they've tackled them, one by one, and done so the right way. She extols the importance of a solid foundation and robust retaining walls. She points to the cinder blocks and the rebar, and explains how her group had to teach a company how to provide high-quality materials, with the promise that they'd buy everything the company made. And she emphasizes that she's there not just to oversee a number of construction projects, but to train Haitians to do it themselves the next time—and to do it right.

The steel-reinforced blocks are rising into walls that will surround a new six-room school for perhaps 200 children in this neighborhood four miles east of Port-au-Prince. The narrow



Much of the emergency aid after the quake flowed in ways that contributed



HAITI

AFTER THE QUAKE

little to sustainable development.

Homes on a hillside in Port-au-Prince. Some were painted by the government through a controversial program that diverted limited funds for cosmetic purposes.

HAITI

AFTER THE QUAKE



Hundreds of thousands of Haitians still live in “temporary” housing made of tarps and tin, five years after being displaced by the earthquake.

site is wedged between two crumbling buildings, both showing earthquake damage. Even to an untrained eye, the differences are obvious between the fragile, deteriorating blocks next door and the solid retaining walls rising at our feet.

Perhaps the damaged buildings tell us something about Haiti itself. Maybe it's about the lack of building codes or a government strong enough to enforce what codes exist. Maybe it's the very need for this school, being built by an international Christian organization in support of a neighborhood church—because the public schools in the city fall so short of providing a decent education.

Maybe the message is found in how hard people like Hilda de Bojorquez—and the Colorado-based group that brought her to Port-au-Prince, Compassion International—has had to work to “build back better” after the earthquake, as President Clinton put it. In the absence of a viable public sector, the Salvadoran engineer and her crew have had to take a DIY approach to everything from providing their own security to doing their own soil analysis. There are no government safety inspections, as long as the proper “fees” are paid.

But maybe the metaphor is actually seen in the workers themselves. The Haitian workers are not only earning a wage or building a

school. They're learning about international seismic standards, about the importance of firm foundations, careful planning, and reliable leadership. Skills they'll teach other Haitians. Skills upon which a more solid future can be built.

Or perhaps it's just a school.

In Case of Emergency

COMPASSION INTERNATIONAL didn't intend to get into the construction business. But the devastating earthquake in Haiti five years ago left the group's staff little choice. “If

its 285 projects in Haiti.

When the Jan. 12, 2010, quake damaged or razed many of the children's schools, Compassion staff responded by rebuilding 30 of them. And all the new schools were constructed in accord with international building standards, which is vital, and sadly all too rare, in this hurricane-prone region.

Other organizations came to similar conclusions after the earthquake. Partners in Health is a group founded in 1987 by Dr. Paul Farmer and current World Bank president Jim Kim. Its mission, in Haiti and

“If we didn't rebuild schools after the earthquake, 25,000 of our kids wouldn't have a school.”

—Matthew Moore

we didn't rebuild schools after the earthquake, 25,000 of our kids wouldn't have a school,” Matthew Moore told *Sojourners* last summer.

Moore, coordinator of Compassion's disaster relief efforts in Haiti, has worked himself out of a job in the five years since the most destructive natural disaster this hemisphere has seen in a century. The organization, which focuses on child development in 26 countries in partnership with 6,500 local churches, has 82,000 children in

around the world, is to “provide a preferential option for the poor in health care.” Through its sister organization Zanmi Lasante (Creole for Partners in Health), it's the largest health-care provider in central Haiti, with more than 4,000 employees, almost all of them Haitians.

In the wake of the earthquake, which killed hundreds of thousands of people and affected virtually everyone in the impoverished country, Partners in Health did all it

Lead engineer Hilda de Bojorquez confers with Compassion International's Matthew Moore in front of a school construction project in Port-au-Prince. Below, two of the 30 schools Compassion built after the quake.

could provide immediate help. "Partners in Health is not a relief organization," Farmer explained in his book *Haiti After the Earthquake*, "but we'll do whatever we can to help."

Farmer is acutely aware that "disasters are never wholly and purely 'natural'": Social conditions play a key role in how an affected area recovers. Before the quake, 70 percent of Haitians lived on \$2 a day or less, and the country's fragile infrastructure—from weak governance and poor construction standards to water insecurity and deforestation—exacerbated the earthquake's already devastating effects. For Farmer, a central tension in such places is between the essential work of direct, immediate service and efforts at policy change—the tension "between serving those right in front of you and seeking to reduce the longer-term risk of others ending up right in front of you." In other words, thousands may be served in existing health clinics, but without a functioning public health system, millions more will go without proper care.

A History of Violence

COMPASSION'S MISSION, in its child development work and other programs, isn't about changing public policy. The group's emphasis is on providing support for children, and through them their families, their churches, and their neighborhoods. It's a community-based approach: Every Compassion project is rooted in a congregation. And since many churches in Haiti have responded to the country's inferior public education system by establishing their own schools, an important part of Compassion's assistance helps low-income families afford school uniforms, books, and tuition. (Elsewhere around the world, staff members said, children in the program are more likely to attend public schools.)

The organization focuses on directly aiding individuals and local communities, instead of working through the public



HAITI

AFTER THE QUAKE



"Disasters are never wholly and purely 'natural.'"

Top, Denia Jasmin, whose son attends a school rebuilt by Compassion after the quake, at home with her children. Above, a mother feeds her daughter at the Child Survival Program.

sector, partly because it has chosen to make that its core competency, and because that approach has brought concrete results. But it's also due to a basic mistrust of government, which in Haiti has a well-deserved reputation of being weak, incompetent, and corrupt. Ironically, though, the condition of Haiti's public institutions isn't unrelated to the way the country has been treated over the years by the outside world.

The nation of Haiti was born out of a rebellion that overthrew one of the most brutal systems of slavery history has seen—creating in 1804 the hemisphere's second independent republic and the world's first nation founded by freed slaves. The U.S., wanting to squelch any hopes for freedom among its own enslaved population, saw its Caribbean neighbor as a threat and undercut the fledgling republic at every turn.

The U.S. wasn't alone in its mistreatment of Haiti. France, the former colonial overseer of the now-independent nation, had the audacity to demand reparations from the new country—extorting payments for the value of "lost property" in the colony, including the "property" of former slaves. Not only has France yet to repay the extorted amount—which in today's dollars, not counting interest, is around \$21 billion—the world has been slow to forgive "debts" like these, regardless of the injustice of their origins.

The 20th century was little better. U.S. Marines invaded and occupied the country

for 19 years. They left behind a series of military-backed despots, culminating in the three-decade-long dictatorships of Papa and Baby Doc Duvalier, who was finally expelled in 1986. The Duvalier regime bled the country of its professional and business class (one-sixth of Haiti's population fled during their reign), centralized power while decimating national institutions other than their own presidency, and neglected the agriculture, health care, and education sectors. A fragile democracy—with weak central institutions and vulnerable to military coups, external debt, and an unstable, export-focused economy—has struggled to provide effective leadership in the years since Duvalier's ouster.

In Baby Doc's time, 80 percent of Haitians lived in rural parts of the country. By the mid-'90s, according to longtime Associated Press correspondent Jonathan Katz, nearly half the population had moved to cities. And about a third of the nation's people, almost 3 million people, were crammed into the area in and around the capital, Port-au-Prince. Almost all of them were affected when the earthquake struck five years ago.

A Down Payment on the Future

AFTER THE QUAKE, the outside world spent billions of dollars on relief and reconstruction efforts. While the emergency aid was essential, much of it flowed in ways that contributed little to sustainable development. (Katz' book on earthquake response efforts is subtitled "How the world came to save Haiti and left behind a disaster.")

Much of the aid money was channeled through the United Nations and other international bodies and through the "republic of NGOs" that serve in Haiti—an estimated 10,000 non-governmental organizations are active in the country, more per capita than anywhere except India. According to the U.N., of the \$1.8 billion in relief assistance after the quake, only 0.3 percent went to the public sector. Much of the official U.S. aid went to the U.S. military's emergency response work.

An influx of money is essential in the wake of a disaster, but it can't go only "to groups like [Partners in Health]—to NGOs or 'faith-based organizations,'" wrote Paul Farmer, referencing his own organization. "Only the Haitian government has both national reach and a mandate to serve the Haitian poor." So while immediate needs

Small businesses started with the aid of the Compassion microloan program include, from top, Francillon Emmanuel's copy shop, Lilian Gervil's bakery, and Herman Estimphil's shoe shop.

were addressed, governance was undercut, not strengthened—and strengthening public institutions will be an essential part of achieving lasting change.

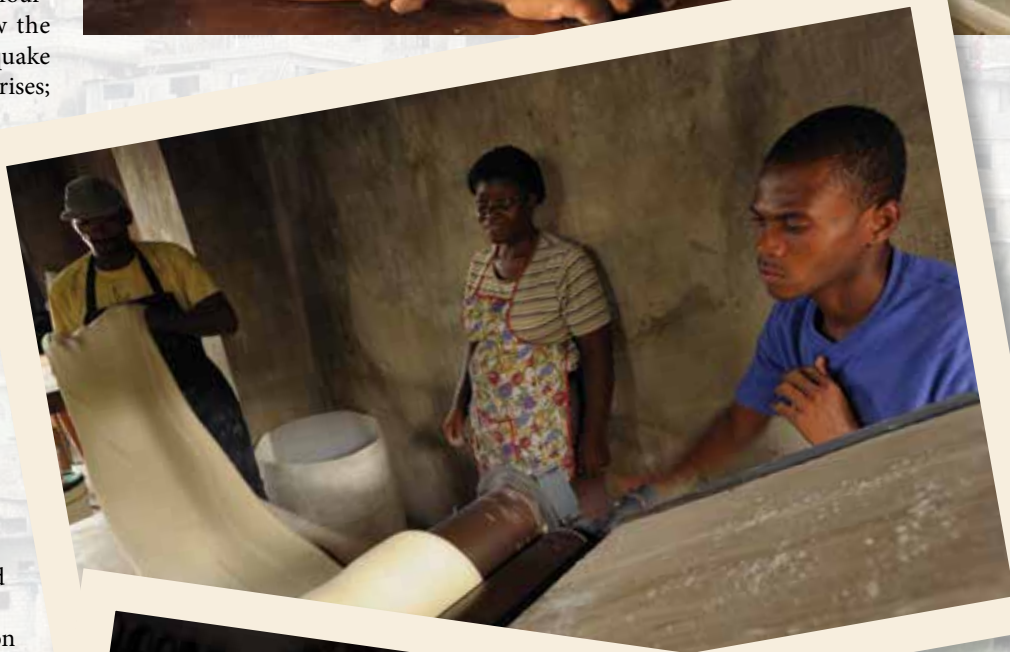
Some, including Farmer, pointed to the sad irony after the earthquake: Billions of aid dollars pouring in, countless people looking for work and enormous amount of work to be done—and yet millions still unemployed. (Estimates of Haiti's unemployment rate range from 40 to 80 percent, and four-fifths of the population lives below the poverty line.) Very little of the post-quake aid money went to Haitian-run enterprises; an AP study found that only 20 of the 1,583 U.S. contracts for recovery aid—\$1.60 out of every \$100 spent—went to Haitian organizations.

Given that situation, Compassion International focused its reconstruction efforts after the earthquake not only on rebuilding schools but also lives, through a microlending program aimed at creating “income-generating activities.” The program distributed \$1.2 million in loans of \$500 to \$2,500, money used to start more than 450 small businesses in the hard-hit areas around Port-au-Prince.

The goal, according to Jean Wilson Plymouth, a Haitian credit officer and leader of the Compassion loan program, was to help people create self-sustaining businesses. “In Haiti, it's very difficult to walk into a bank and get a loan,” Plymouth told *Sojourners*. Other non-profits that do microfinance loans charge high interest fees to make enough to run their programs; Compassion was able to charge low fees because it used donated money to support the program.

Matthew Moore, who directed Compassion's reconstruction efforts, emphasized the merit-based nature of the loans. Before granting a loan, questions included: Is the business viable? Are there other similar businesses in the area? Is this business likely to succeed? Loan recipients—usually family members of children in other Compassion programs, 60 percent of

Continued on Page 46



THE BEATITUDES

Sojourners invited some of our favorite contemporary authors—religious and otherwise—to offer their reflections on the beatitudes. Second in a series.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

—Matthew 5:4

The Possibility of Heaven

“After all, hadn’t God led me here so you and I can deal with this together?” my mother said • by EDWIDGE DANTICAT

A YEAR BEFORE her death from ovarian cancer, my 78-year-old mother finally started losing weight. She gave up fatty foods and sweets and went to herbalists who sold her pills that were supposed to regulate her digestion. In addition to all this, she was seeing her primary physician every three months.

The weight flying off seemed like a reward for her good behavior. The only downside was that my mother, who now weighed less than me, was burping all the time, as if there was thunder trapped inside her ever-shrinking body.

At Christmas time, I invited her to come spend the holidays with me and my family in Miami. At first she said no. Her birthday was three days after Christmas and she wanted to spend it at her home in New York.

She changed her mind right before Christmas, and she cooked us a wonderful Christmas dinner, and we took her to one of our favorite Haitian restaurants for her birthday. At her birthday dinner, my two daughters performed a birthday dance for her in the middle of the restaurant, and my usually reserved mother laughed and clapped with joy, a kind of joy we would rarely see again in the months that followed.

I took my mother to see my primary physician right after New Year’s. I could see an alarmed look on the doctor’s face as soon as she touched my mother’s stomach, which in spite of her weight loss was twice its usual size. The doctor, who is also a friend, asked me to touch my mother’s distended belly, and the spot where her fingers led me felt like a well-polished rock. She immediately started writing down a list of tests my mother would need.

Each test led to another, more-complicated test, and slowly both Mom and I realized that we were not on a quest to disprove something bad but on an expedition to identify how bad it was.

I would refer to it as a mass, not a tumor or cancer, until the doctor actually sat my mother down and

explained the sizes and the staging and how cancer was not always a mass as we often thought, but how it was sometimes like a blanket over organs or chains that trapped them and how sometimes cancer can’t be cut out, but only minimally reduced.

I thought my mother would burst into tears—I did—but she did not. She listened attentively and nodded. Her face betrayed no trace of fright or panic. She was still.

My mother’s stillness remained throughout her entire journey through cancer. From her first chemo treatment to her last, she showed a depth of faith that I have never witnessed up close before. Her faith was not so much in the doctors or the medicine but in the belief that things would turn out exactly the way they were supposed to. “After all, hadn’t God led me here so you and I can deal with this together?” she’d say.

I have three wonderful and supportive brothers, but I am the oldest child and my mother’s only daughter. For the past 12 years, my mother and I have lived more than 1,000 miles apart. She was working in sweatshops in New York for eight of the first 12 years of my life, while I was living in Haiti with family members. Though she was there for the births of both of my daughters and for every other adult milestone in my life, my mother and I have spent more of our lives apart than together.

“It must be impossible,” one of my brothers said, after Mom’s round of chemo reduced her tumors then ballooned them, “knowing that you are soon going to die.”

My mother did not make it seem impossible. Once I stopped interrupting her mid-sentence after she’d say “When I die ...,” she was able to pick out a dress, a hat, and some gloves to wear in her chosen coffin. She also picked the hymns she wanted us to sing at her funeral service and even gifted my young daughters with white headbands to wear in their hair.

Illustration by M.P. Wiggins



Mom also regularly quoted from scripture she loved. On her funeral prayer card, she wanted 2 Timothy 4:7-8: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day." Those verses were to be her final witness, her last testimony.

But for the rest of us, for those she was leaving behind, she wanted us to know, and she had me read it out loud many times after the Lord's Prayer during our evening devotions: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

As of this writing, my mother has only been dead for one month. It is much too early for me to feel comforted. But if I could, I would wrap these words around my body and have them surround me like a cocoon, or even blankets or chains, for the rest of my life.

THE NIGHT BEFORE my mother died, she was lying in a hospital bed in the room she called her own in my house. I hated the fact that the hospital bed had suddenly taken away our ability to lie in bed together and listen to the radio when she couldn't sleep. So I lay on a sleeping bag on the floor as she tossed and turned all night.

The next morning, she told me to call the hospice nurse and ask for something to calm her down. Before the nurse could give her the pain medication she'd avoided throughout her entire illness, I said, "I love you, Mom." And she replied in Haitian Creole, "I love you, too." *Mwen renmen w tou.*

The nurse then asked if I wanted to call the minister friend who'd been counseling my mother through her illness. While I was on the phone with the minister, the nurse called me in and told me to talk to my mother.

"I love you," I told her again. "You're a wonderful mother."

My mother smiled.

I thought I was imagining the smile, so I asked the nurse, my mother-in-law, the social worker, and the nurse's assistant who'd all since arrived.

"Is she really smiling?" I asked them all.

"Yes, she's smiling," they all confirmed.

Then I asked my mother, "Mommy, can you see heaven?"

I don't know why I said that, but I realize now that I really wanted an answer. I wanted to know that she was going to be okay, that after all this terrible suffering she was going to be comforted.

Then, while taking her final three deep breaths, my mother smiled her biggest smile since she learned that she was going to die.

That my mother could both hear my voice and see heaven—or the possibility of heaven—at the same time makes the fulfillment of Jesus' promise seem not just attainable but ultimately possible: Blessed am I, as I mourn, for I shall be comforted. ■

Edwidge Danticat is the award-winning author of numerous books, including most recently *Claire of the Sea Light*. She lives in Miami.

Poetry

BY ABIGAIL CARROLL

Camper Bike, 2008. A sculptural piece by Kevin Cyr.



Dear Francis,

When it comes to living small, you were ahead of your time, which is why I nominate you patron saint of tiny homes. So you haven't heard of them? Think: chapel for one on wheels with cedar floors, a loft to sleep, and a skylight in the roof—here is where I'd go to pray, and where I pray to live (pending a friend to let me squat, and the zoning board's OK). It's a new way of being poor. I hope you will approve.

Humbly,

Abigail Carroll, author of *Three Squares: The Invention of the American Meal*, lives in Winooski, Vermont.



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A pregnant feminist reflects on the need for good male mentors in a society loaded with damaging masculine norms • by CASEY FLEMING

ALL THE 14-YEAR-OLD BOYS kill their grandmothers.

I stole the line—“It was the day my grandmother exploded”—from Iain Banks’ novel *The Crow Road*.

I write it on the whiteboard on the first day of school, and ask my ninth graders to compose a short story starting with that prompt. The girls go for metaphor—their Nanas and Mee-Maws explode in frustration or laughter.

The boys go literal and explode their grandmothers into bone-chunks and guts. Usually I laugh. Not this year. I’m pregnant with a baby boy, and I’d prefer he never explode anything, especially the women who love him.

During the five years I’ve taught this lesson, meant to celebrate the punch of a great opening line, the Tsarnaev brothers blew up the

seducing his mother and stealing his riches. His long-absent father may or may not have died during his sea voyage home from Troy.

Telemachus ping-pongs between impulsive, angry fits and quiet desperation. Then the goddess Athena appears on his doorstep. She disguises herself, first as Mentos and then as Mentor, both old friends of Odysseus, both with names that mean “wise.” Athena counsels Telemachus using Mentor’s build and voice. Telemachus needs Athena—his father is war-torn, traumatized, a broken man. When Odysseus arrives home, he pulls Telemachus into a violent, ugly retribution; father and son slaughter the suitors, hang handmaids by their braids, and dismember a disloyal servant. Just as civil war threatens to ensue, Athena saves the day. Homer ends his story

with the goddess, again disguised as Mentor, quelling anger and inspiring peace in her mortal mentees.

When news of the Boston Marathon bomb-

ing hit my computer, I remember feeling concerned for Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, hiding, wounded, at the bottom of a boat. I remember thinking, “Telemachus.” So many violent young men share his story: absent fathers, a sense of powerlessness and shame, a personal history of conflict and uprootedness, economic hardship, damaging myths of masculinity their only influences, and a lack of true mentors to empower them out of entitlement and vengeance and into compassion and grace.

I CAN’T RAISE a good boy on my own. No mother can. My son will need male mentors. All our sons need them, and their mentors cannot and should not always be their fathers. Right now our young boys need elders to guide them over the various thresholds of their lives—we have few male teachers in lower grade levels, few male clergy uninfected by the prevailing social politics and who remember Jesus as a God of gentleness and love, few noble politicians, few professional athletes that value character over dominance, and few popular models of masculinity that meet Homer’s original criteria.

Most stories about maleness suffer from

Clear Eyes, Full Hearts

Boston Marathon finish line, George Zimmerman killed Trayvon Martin, Adam Lanza devastated Newtown, Conn., by firing bullets into each of 20 small children and six adults, and Elliot Rodger carried out a misogyny-fueled killing spree in Isla Vista, Calif. I live in Texas, where gun-lovers and worried moms persist in a steady stand-off about open carry laws.

My students remain unaffected by these horrors—they’re privileged children at a college prep school, the boys more concerned with GPAs and J.J. Watt’s football stats than the way some males—especially white males—in our country use violence or sullen indifference to respond to their perceived disenfranchisement. They idolize Walter White and George R.R. Martin; most identify as Christians but cannot tell me who Job is or recite the beatitudes.

I worry about my unborn son. How do I raise a good white male? I ask all the good men I know, and they give me the same answer: “He’ll need a mentor.”

The word “mentor” comes from the *Odyssey*. Every year, my freshmen read Homer’s epic poem, and every year the myth turns and turns like a kaleidoscope, its shapes and colors coalescing into bright, complex new truths. Homer does not begin his song with Odysseus, the war hero, but with his son, Telemachus, home alone in Ithaca and struggling to assert himself, a boy-child on the cusp of manhood. Telemachus does not remember his father, but he yearns for *kleos*, the renown or glory bestowed by fathers onto their sons. A spoiled prince, he feels powerless in the face of suitors hell-bent on

I worry about my unborn son. How do I raise a good white male?

what theologian Walter Wink called “the myth of redemptive violence,” the dangerous narrative that violence is a natural means to order and stability, and that power in others is a threat to our own power. These stories promote a male empowerment that requires the disempowerment of others and therefore views female or minority empowerment movements as threats.

Mentor is a wise, older male, but he has internalized a divine, female wisdom. He embodies female power; his strength does not repress the other, but integrates it.

The best representation of male power I’ve seen in the popular media in the last 10 years was *Friday Night Lights*’ Eric Taylor, the head coach of the Dillon Panthers on NBC’s sleeper hit. Taylor coaches his players—largely fatherless—on and off the field, and while he sets steep physical expectations, violence is never the endgame. In his khaki shorts, white sneakers, and well-parted hair, he is no paragon of traditional masculinity. Still, struggling young men leave his team whole. They understand community and display real moral strength.

But Eric is not the savior of the saga: His marriage is the true story behind the boys’ success. He mentors so well because Tami Taylor’s voice sings in him. In one episode, she tells him, “You are a teacher first, and a molder of men.” She is sparkling, grey-eyed Athena, the wise goddess inside the man who saves the boys.

Let some divine power inspire the men of my generation toward mentorship. No more explosions. Let these men have clear eyes and full hearts. Let them work with women and not against them. Let us together embolden our little boys to seek lasting peace. ■

Casey Fleming is a writer and teacher at The Kinkaid School in Houston. Her first child, a son, was born in November.



Stop Using God to Justify Abuse

I HAD AN EXPERIENCE with a young man who was having difficulty in seminary, having difficulty with his wife. His wife was a flight attendant, so they had limited time together. He came pounding on my door one morning.

"I've got to talk to you," he said, "because I want you to hear it from me before you hear it from somebody else. I don't want you to put me out of school. Me and my wife are through."

"Well, come in. Tell me, what's going on."

"Last night, we had a fight and she got upset and she told me that, even when she was there, I wasn't."

"What happened?"

"I had to show her," he said. "I got my Bible and I showed her that I am about God's work. God comes first and you, wife, come second."

"What did she say?"

"She said, 'You and your God can go to hell!' You know I don't need a woman like that in my life! I need somebody that's going to support me in my ministry."

I said, "You didn't hear what she said. What she said was, You and *you* go to hell. Because your God is *you*. Because you told her, 'There are no legitimate needs or desires or feelings in this house other than mine.'"

"Well, what could I have said?"

"You use God to create a hierarchy in your relationship: God first, family second, church third. But God does away with all that. Once God is at the center, every aspect of my existence is informed by my relationship with God. You could say, 'Because God is at the center, you will never have to be second to anyone. Because I want to love you the way God wants you loved.' We've got to flip this thing so we stop using God to justify abuse."

—John W. Kinney

From a story told at The Summit 2014,
an annual convening of leaders by Sojourners.

The Slippery Slope of 'Snakeology'

Theology is not about domination. That's the snake talking.

RECENTLY, several highly publicized events of domestic violence have reminded us of the epidemic proportions of relational abuse. While the focus has been on athletes, abuse has taken place from the halls of Congress to the pulpits of churches. We have also experienced, particularly from church leaders, a vocal outcry against such abuse.

This outcry, however, remains superficial, shallow, and disingenuous if we are not willing to challenge some of our dominant theological assumptions that provide the conceptual framework for the maintenance of this abuse.

Many of the early church fathers affirmed the subservient and secondary status of women and even encouraged the "control" and "forceful instruction" of women in order to maintain conformance to what they saw as God's "relational design." Even today, some promise to affirm women only as long as they stay in their "God-ordained place." In other words, women can expect "favor" only when they remain defined by and conformed to a "divinely" decreed order and hierarchy.

Tragically, this hierarchy is established by the curse and the culture—not the creation and certainly not the Christ. When the curse and the culture establish our doctrine, we embrace "snakeology," not theology. This snakeology distorts the character of God, relationships, authentic manhood, and authentic womanhood.

The revelation of God in creation, Christ, and the Holy Spirit invites us all to experience the breaking of the bonds of the Fall and to celebrate the liberating truth in God's self-disclosive expressions. The celebration can commence with a return to our beginnings.

THE TESTIMONIES OF the creative event recorded in Genesis provide a core principle related to God's intent and desire for human relationships, the developing family, and the human community. Men and women are called into a relationship characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, and shared responsibility.

The creation testimonies reveal the true nature of power in relationships. Creation is an act of

A powerful man requires no one to be in a place beneath him
and needs no victim to substantiate his power.

Shutterstock

The snake distorts the character of the lifegiver and the value of the gift of life.

divine release for the living empowerment of all. Traditional approaches project a being creating life as an exercise of power and sovereignty, establishing control and demanding glorification. But the Christian testimony presents a God who does not control life, but gives life. In the combined creation narratives of Genesis, one encounters the Creator who releases breath and energy and who shapes and invests in the life of the cosmos. Being is birthed by the acts of God as the Creator offers life for life.

In giving for life, God establishes the authentic paradigm for powerful existence. Power is no longer a function of domination, control, and hierarchical superiority. Power is presented as the possessing of enough security in being that one can release life from one's center to birth life in empty and lifeless space. The omnipotent God is so secure in being that God is not threatened by the giving of life to all life.

God's power does not diminish, restrict, or limit life, but rather creates flourishing abundance. The power revealed in creation is not the power to be *over*, but rather the power to be *with*: life-giving power. Real power doesn't destroy, kill, bind, take, or divide, but rather it fruitfully releases life force to create, heal, and restore.

In creating humans in the divine image, God

calls us to life-giving responsibility. We are made in God's image and commanded to be fruitful and multiply. To be fruitful is to be like God and to give of self to bring forth life.

Fruitfulness is breathing life and offering light to those places where the powers of death and darkness have staked a claim. "Be fruitful" is the original command and the identity of the faithful will be established by the fruit they bear. Fruitful existence will enable creatures claiming and celebrating the image of God to move into "dying" communities, relationships, and people and release life to bring forth life.

In this manner, humans become partners

in creation. We are pro-creative. With the blessing of life comes the responsibility of guarding and cultivating the garden. To guard the garden is to value, protect, and care for the life given; to cultivate the garden is to work, invest, and give oneself in such a way that life continues to come forth. Death and separation enter the garden when we stop giving and focus on getting and taking power, positions, and possessions.

THE SNAKE PRESENTS a lie and paints a picture that is not in harmony with the God revealed in creation. The snake presents a God who is neither giving nor *with* you, but rather a God who is *over* you, trying to keep you down and limit your possibilities. The giving God becomes a withholding, threatened God. The snake not only lies about God, but also lies about the character of human creation. The value and flourishing of humanity is diminished and we are projected as denied, inadequate beings that can only

experience real power by getting and possessing something outside of ourselves. Death and separation enter the world, and the abundant life of giving is diminished to taking and dying.

Succumbing to the lie, we are distanced from the God who is with us, and we hide from a God who is beyond us and over us. We are now separated from our true selves, and we are ashamed of the bodies that once glorified God. We are now in conflict and competing for place with those who once were partners and viewed as gifts from the creator. We now struggle with nature and destroy the garden.

We now play power games of coercion, manipulation, and control. By modeling the over-God, we now repress our bodies, compete with neighbors, and war with nature. Value is in what you get, have, keep, and control, not in who you are. Neither celebrating life nor giving life, we try to "be somebody" by getting something, using all we can, and then we die. Rather than giving fruit (be fruitful) and offering life, we take fruit (eat) and enter death. Rather than imaging God and giving life, we struggle to be gods, take all we can, and die.

This is the real tragic consequence of the Fall. Theology constructed from the *logos* of the Fall gives rise to snakeology. Perpetuating the Fall, snakeology teaches that God is the powerful ruler over you who is threatened by human self-expression and is glorified when you stay in your place. We exercise power when we can control in the manner of the supreme God. The more power you have, the more you can get, and the more power you get and keep, the more value you have. Domination is divinized,

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superiority is sacralized, and stratification is spiritualized.

As suggested in Genesis 3, this fragmentation has dire consequences for the family. Children become a pain, male-female relationships become hierarchical, care becomes irresponsible, and survival becomes a struggle. In the hierarchy, our moral responsibility to the “other” is diminished and our ethics is reduced to charity where we help, fix, instruct, and/or cleanse those who are deemed beneath us. The “superior” affirms the “good” by keeping the “inferior” in their place and helping them be “good”—by force if necessary. Any deviation in the service provided by the lesser to the greater

**In Christ, life is embraced,
not controlled.**

necessitates a justifiable corrective response. We invite people to come to church to be cursed and encourage misdirected devotion by teaching them to give authority to fallen systems rather than to God.

The introduction of hierarchy in relationships was a consequence of the Fall and sin. Relationships modeled after hierarchal principles reflect neither God's intent nor the vision of the family restored in Jesus Christ. In the beginning, and in the Christ re-creation, children are not “pains” to be abused, neglected, and objectified, but rather gifts from God to be loved, nurtured, and equipped. Women are not weak bodies to be possessed, pitied, and put on a pedestal, but rather creative, fruitful partners. Men are not controlling tyrants, but rather power-filled, caring lovers.

MALE HEADSHIP IS not about a position in a hierarchy but rather a deep commitment to presence and to radical investment in a relationship. Man-power is revealing the power of God by bringing forth life in all life. A powerful man requires no one to be in a place beneath him and needs no victim to substantiate his power.

Regrettably, much of what we teach, preach, and practice in the church provides the underpinnings for the reality of relational abuse. We ask for forgiveness, express our love for everybody, but then maintain the same theological framework that nourishes alienation and fragmentation. Deceived, we embrace as the truth the lies of the father of all lies.

While we can be deceived, the snake

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Meet the **SUSTAINERS CIRCLE**

SOJOURNERS MONTHLY GIVING CLUB

Sheryl Hansen Smith

WE ARE PLEASED to introduce you to our faithful friend Sheryl Hansen Smith. Sheryl and her husband, Brad, live in Livonia, Mich., where she works as a research administrator at the University of Michigan Medical School.

Sheryl's membership in the Sojourners Sustainers Circle began in 2010, but she has been a reader of our online content for even longer. She appreciates the way Sojourners challenges Christians to think more deeply and broadly about what it means to be a true follower of Jesus. Approaching faith in this manner and encouraging Christians to wrestle honestly with some of the most difficult issues of our day resonates powerfully with Sheryl, who found us at a time when she was feeling isolated from the church. In the community she found through Sojourners, she says, "My faith and my spirit were enlivened and thoroughly renewed."

"Sojourners helps to remind me every day of my values," Sheryl tells us. "I am a member of the Sustainers Circle because I believe so passionately in the work and mission of Sojourners. In it I find hope—and a way to put into practice my firm belief that we have to come together to do a much better job of taking care of each other and our communities."

Thank you, Sheryl, for being such a steadfast ally as we work together for the common good!



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cannot alter the character of our God. God still releases Godness for the empowerment of all creation. God is still the power-filled giver who is so secure in and so full of life that the Creator lives to give. God still gives life where death tries to stake a claim. The living God is experienced as the one who so loved the world that he gave. Jesus Christ, the Son and the “seed,” exposes the lie of the snake, and provides the resources for the recovery of life’s authentic being and genuine community.

The Christ event challenges the categories. Beginning with the virgin conception, one can suggest how the Christ event offers a corrective to the distortion of the fallen paradigm. The manner of the birth of Jesus speaks to all fragmentations of existence spawned by the Fall.

Jesus comes as Emmanuel, “God is with us.” The distant over-God projected by fallenness is exposed as no God at all. God is with us and has neither left the garden nor

Domination is divinized, superiority is sacralized, and stratification is spiritualized.

ceased giving in the garden. We experience again the God who risks being with and whose power rests not in domination, but presence. This is good news. God is with us.

The virgin conception testimony reassigns value to human life, as Jesus is born of a woman by the power of God. This is not a biological statement to get humanity out of Jesus (Mary is human), but rather a theological statement to put God back into humanity. Birth is a holy and blessed event and human life is not filthy, ragged, or worm-like. This event also breaks down the hierarchy as little places, poor people, and women are elevated to full partnership in life-giving activity and the rich are not left out.

Godliness is lived here in relation to men, women, stars, trees, animals, and earth. In Jesus Christ, we get down to earth and the image of creation is represented and reclaimed. In his birth, we encounter a “new” God and a “new” humanity. We encounter a God who is present and giving and a humanity that is God-birthed, valued, and called to be fruitful. In the birth and person of Jesus, life is restored and from life flows life.

Jesus images the true God and true humanity and reveals the nature of a powerful, relational God. Jesus lives his life, in word and deed, giving himself for life and inviting others to abundant life. Life is not controlled by getting possessions, position, or power, but life is anchored in a living creator, a redeeming encounter, a secure self, and a sure promise. In Jesus, life is embraced, not controlled—and one experiences to the depths the presence of the life force of God. Hierarchies collapse and men and women no longer compete for control, but they live and flourish with God, each other, and all creation. ■

John W. Kinney is dean of the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University and pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Beaver Dam, Va. Portions of this article were published in Baptists Against Racism.

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By Robert Hirschfield

Redemptive Verses

Poet and Vietnam vet Bruce Weigl writes of war and reconciliation.

POET BRUCE WEIGL inhabits two places in his life, in his work. Two places that could not be more different. But in the course of our conversations, I come to think of them as a single place, the way two hands are part of a single body. One place is Lorain, Ohio. The other is Vietnam.

Ever since the Vietnam War ended, the life of this mill worker's son has swung between those two far-flung poles.

I met Weigl at a Starbucks in Manhattan's East Village. I was interviewing a friend of his, Adrie Kusserow, about her book of poems on South Sudan. Weigl was content just to drink his coffee and listen to us talk. He intervened only once, when Kusserow and I began decrying public indifference to South Sudan's pre-independence history of slaughter, enslavement, and banishment by Sudan.

"If I may defend my fellow human beings here, there are so many places in the world today where there is suffering. It is understandable that people may miss one or two," he said.

The suffering of the Vietnamese, and of soldiers like himself who fought in Vietnam, is still burned into his psyche like some gory tattoo. It is to be found in every one of his 13 books.

In his poem "Ice Storm," from *The Abundance of Nothing* (TriQuarterly Books),

A U.S. B-52 releases
bombs over North
Vietnam, circa 1970.

U.S. Air Force photo

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Change Things*

words for prayer or for peace,” he wrote, but their presence taught him such things were possible.

Years later, in Boston, he met his teacher, Vietnamese monk Nguyen Ba Chung, who told him that if he wanted to become a Buddhist, he should stop reading about Buddhism and start practicing it. He began practicing meditation, walking the path of nonviolence.



Peggy Turbett, The Plain Dealer/Landov

“I died in Vietnam, and was reborn in poetry.”

He’s been back to Vietnam a dozen times since the war. (I think of a human moth returning to the flame that consumed its spirit.) He speaks Vietnamese with a Hanoi accent. He translates Vietnamese poets into English, and teaches them to his students, first at Penn State, now at Lorain County Community College. “I died in Vietnam, and was reborn in poetry,” he likes to say.

*Through the dark tenements and
fallen temples
we wander into Old Hanoi,
oil lamps glowing in small
storefronts and restaurants
where those, so long ago my enemy,
sit on low chairs and praise the simple evening.*

—“Dialectical Materialism,” from *Song of Napalm* (Atlantic Monthly Press)

“IT WAS STRANGE returning to Lorain,” he admits. “Being dropped back there as if everything was still the same. No one talked about PTSD back then, and no one wanted to talk

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New & Noteworthy

LIVING GOD’S REIGN

In *Witnessing: Prophecy, Politics, and Wisdom*, edited by Maria Clara Bingemer and Peter Casarella, international scholars write on many aspects of Christian witness, including martyrdom (especially Catholic martyrs in El Salvador), personal narrative, the interlocking realities of God’s beauty and justice, and intercultural dialogue. Orbis

PROPHET AT THE GATES

Forward Together: A Moral Message for the Nation gathers the speeches of North Carolina NAACP president William J. Barber at the 2013 Moral Mondays protests and other progressive events in that state. Powerful God-rooted words, yearning for equality and justice for all. Chalice Press

PEACE ADVENTURES

Since nonviolently resisting a snowball barrage at age 7, Quaker David Hartsough (executive director of Peaceworkers and co-founder of the Nonviolent Peaceforce) has put peace into practice. His story, *Waging Peace: Global Adventures of a Lifelong Activist*, is both an optimistic memoir and a resource for activists. PM Press



LENS OF CREATION

The Salt of the Earth is a documentary following the cross-continental travels of photographer Sebastião Salgado over the past 40 years. The film is beautiful and jarring—a stunningly captured testament to the magnificence of creation and the waywardness of humankind. Directed by Wim Wenders with Salgado’s son, Juliano. Sony Classics

short-listed for the 2013 Pulitzer Prize, he writes:

*I got my own personal Jacob’s ladder,
buddy, reader, listener to this
sad song. I built a temple for the ghosts
because they just kept coming.*

Weigl’s work is strewn with ghosts: ghosts of Vietnamese children hit by American fire (but also the cherished non-ghost, his adopted Vietnamese daughter, Hahn), the ghosts of a soldier’s legs severed by a Bouncing Betty, the ghost of his own lost self, inflicted miserably on bar girls. He constructs a stairway of ghosts that empties into a redemptive space. A space that has prevailed over the ghosts, while being unable to actually evict them.

Sometimes, in Vietnam, he’d float into the strange contemplative space of Buddhist monks. Saffron flares radiating peace in the jaws of war. “They did not teach us / the

The Persistent Strain

THE WEEK leading up to the Michael Brown non-verdict was one in which race was at the forefront of daily life, at least as much as it was in the ancient days of my Mississippi upbringing.

You could say that week started with President Obama's executive action on immigration. The next morning, I did household chores and listened to NPR coverage of the often-heated reaction to the president's speech. The next day, my wife and I drove into Louisville to see *Dear White People*, Justin Simien's devastatingly clever and thoughtful take on racism and identity politics among the Obama generation.

The movie made me laugh (at a volume embarrassing to my poor spouse) and even applaud in the middle of a crowded theater. It also left me pondering the persistence of the white supremacist virus in the American body politic. Over the past half-century, the film suggests, it may have evolved into a



Ku Klux Klan members gather for a cross burning in Hico, Texas, in May 1994.

fairly airtight case that, despite his efforts to not be the "black" president, opposition to Obama and his policies has often been motivated by fear and/or resentment of his race. Coates' analysis centers especially on the right-wing firestorms that ensued when, in two famous racial-profiling cases, Obama acknowledged that he could identify with the victims because of his own race.

The class with which I discussed the article was almost entirely young and African American, and their conclusion was that, while a lot has changed about white racism in the previous two generations, the virus is still around, albeit sometimes in subtle and elusive form. As one young man in the class put it, now you can get the interview, but you never know why you didn't get the job.

One of the students in that class shared that consensus about U.S. racism, but came at it from

a different angle. She is a young woman, originally from Mexico, who only recently gained temporary legal resident status under Obama's previous executive action, DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). Last summer, as an intern at a regional daily, she wrote a story about her long childhood trek across the Southwestern desert. One of her projects for my class was a story about her undocumented father's struggle with kidney disease.

There was nothing in Obama's rather modest new immigration order for my student's family. But listening to some of

the Republican reaction after his announcement, you'd have thought the president was turning the country over to the Mexican drug cartels. The essence of the critique from some Republican members of Congress was that the president was trying to "goad" or "bait" them into doing something crazy in response.

And there is something about the notion of our black president taking decisive action, without begging for approval, that makes some people a little bit crazy. That madness may be compounded when the decisive action is taken on behalf of the basic human rights of mostly brown people.

That scenario seems to activate an old, semi-dormant virus, one that specializes in attacking the brains of white folk. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



White supremacy may have weakened, but it can still make us sick.

weaker strain, but it's still lurking in there, and it can still make us sick.

A few evenings later, at the historically black college where I teach, my "Magazine and Feature Writing" class was discussing "Fear of a Black President," by Ta-Nehisi Coates, which appeared in the September 2012 issue of *The Atlantic*. In his epic essay, Coates takes Obama to task for failing to follow up on his 2008 "Jeremiah Wright" speech in which he seemed poised to lead the U.S. in confronting its racial demons. At the same time, Coates also makes a

Laura L. Camden/Getty Images

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about it. And those of us who wanted to get involved with the anti-war movement found that those people didn't trust us either."

As one of "those people," I stand chastened. Our idea of borders was as unbending as those who insisted that North Vietnam and South Vietnam were separate countries. The U.S. soldier stood on the wrong side of our border.

Despite the inner bedlam of flashbacks, drugs, and alcohol, Weigl was unable to sever ties with Lorain. Leaving his hometown forever would have been easy, he admits.

"What made you stay?"

"The first poets who caught my eye early on were James Wright (from Martins Ferry, Ohio) and Philip Levine (from Detroit). I saw how they made a kind of beauty out of the wreckage of the industrial city. Wright's poems taught me that you didn't have to grow up in the Shenandoah Valley to write about where you grew up. If it was the steel mills or the slag heaps, that was your landscape. You don't have to change your birthplace for another place."

He somehow managed to keep intact his stubbornly held sense of place, family, and family history.

I think of the mystery of stability within instability. I think of the flinty gratitude of Weigl's Lorain poetry.

*Around hot steel these men twisted bands
until their fingers would not open in the
morning,
and in my hungry brain
a spirit recalls my father,
home from the mill in his white T-shirt
like a god
and the smell of the mill all over his body
and the taste of his delicious sweat.*

—"Why We Are Forgiven," from *What Saves Us* (TriQuarterly Books)

IT'S NOT AS IF Weigl deliberately returned to Vietnam to find what was missing in his life. Or to find anything in particular, for that matter. His first visit back, in 1986, was wholly unpremeditated. Tom Nussbaumer, with whom he edited the anti-interventionist *Intervention Magazine*, had been invited to Hanoi by a Vietnamese general. Nussbaumer, in turn, invited Weigl.

They were herded from their hotel to



A YEAR OF GREAT FILMS

THIS PAST MOVIE year I've been delighted by, among other things, nonviolent resolutions, a guy talking in a car, an Irish priest trying to do the right thing, and a five-dimensional bookcase. Here's my list of the 10 best films of 2014 (many more are worthy, but 10 are all that will fit).

10. PRIDE. A delightful and stirring celebration of marginalized people turning their woundedness into helping others, as LGBTQ activists support the Thatcher-era British coal miners' strike.

9. THE LEGO MOVIE. This turned out to be both the most unpredictably fun and one of the wisest films of the year. A brilliant critique of consumerism and political tyranny, with an ending that inverts the myth of redemptive violence.

8. LOVE IS STRANGE. A lovely, mournful romance, as a couple forced apart by prejudice teaches us the meaning of commitment. John Lithgow soars.

7. INTERSTELLAR. Extravagant adventure cinema, misunderstood as sentimental. Looked at more closely, the exploration of time is an intelligent grappling with not just how things work, but what God might be—a transcendently loving consciousness wooing us into a rescued future.

6. IDA. A beautiful, aching film about the post-Holocaust transitional generation and the meaning of religion.

5. BIRDMAN. Crazy and deep, Michael Keaton's finest hour, and a wild ride into

the soul of an artist: The vocation that causes its stewards to fly, or crash, or fly while crashing.

4. THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL. Forensic detail mingles with glorious exuberance in Wes Anderson's melancholic treatment of war, adventure, and regret.

3. THE IMMIGRANT. James Gray's bleak yet hopeful drama evokes the tone and hues of *The Godfather*; Marion Cotillard is still the best actress working today and Joaquin Phoenix her match. A film about selfish behavior collapsing on itself when it beholds courage.

2. THE CONGRESS. The most visually splendid film of the year, and the most moving. Robin Wright works to subvert military-industrial-entertainment superficiality in an extraordinary take on Stanislaw Lem's novel about identity, love, economics, culture, revolution, and healing.

1. CALVARY. *High Noon*, *Diary of a Country Priest*, and *Ryan's Daughter* walk into the bar where John Michael McDonagh makes films about imperfect people doing perfect things—this time a priest trying to discern just what it means to love God and people at the same time. The magnificent *Calvary* is various parts horrifyingly absurd, politically challenging, and credibly redemptive. ■

Gareth Higgins is a northern Irish writer living in North Carolina. He co-presents thefilmtalk.com and soulelegram.com.

orphanages by government minders, as Vietnam had yet to officially open its doors to Western visitors.

But even after that first visit, Weigl noticed one important change. “The nightmares I had been having about Vietnam two or three times a week suddenly stopped. I replaced bad memories with good ones, memories of war with memories of children playing in the street. It was like having a switch turned off in your brain. I was amazed that kind of thing could happen.”

When the poet speaks of his second life among the Vietnamese, and his links with them, he speaks of it as casually as he might a trip to the store. Perhaps he doesn’t want me making some big hagiographic deal out of it.

On that first trip over, Weigl was introduced to Miss Tao in Ho Chi Minh City. She had been imprisoned for a year during the war in one of South Vietnam’s infamous “tiger cages,” where she was exposed to the heat and the rain and had quicklime poured on her. It’s been years since I thought of the tiger cages. Back in the early ’70s, they were splashed across the front pages of *The New York Times* with the same lurid headlines that later escorted Abu Ghraib and waterboarding into U.S. consciousness.

“While she was telling her story, every once in a while she would cringe. I’d say something stupid: ‘It must seem like yesterday.’ She corrected me, ‘No, like today.’ It was the first time I had met someone who was



During a recent visit to northern Vietnam, American poet Bruce Weigl offers prayers with friends at a shrine in Ha Nam Province. The shrine commemorates the soldiers from a nearby village who died in the war.

had suffered in the war just as I had suffered.”

“Did they ever ask you about the war, and what you did in the war?”

“They were careful about questions like that. They were curious, but they were not accusatory. They understood that when you are a soldier, you are sent to war. That’s what

cultures are blessed?

Weigl is able to share with his students at Lorain the results of a strange literary unearthing. In the early ’90s, working at the William Joiner Institute for the Study of War and Social Consequences at UMass, he was handed a rolled-up, nine-and-a-half-mile-long piece of microfiche containing documents taken from the dead bodies of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers.

“I went to the library with a Vietnamese woman who was working at the institute, and we had a look. Along with the diaries and maps, I saw something that looked like poems. ‘What are poems doing here?’ I asked her. She said, ‘Soldiers in the field, away from home, often wrote poems.’”

The poems became a book, *Poems from Captured Documents*, that Weigl translated and the University of Massachusetts Press published.

I ask him about his students’ reactions to the poems. His normally low voice shoots up an octave:

“They react pretty much as I reacted: The Vietnamese soldiers sound to them an awful lot like our own. They miss their families.

Continued on Page 42

Weigl began meeting with Vietnamese poets, who he found were also writing about the war.

tortured by the South Vietnamese forces. It opened my mind, made me realize it was being done, if not under the guidance, at least under the protection of the U.S. To look at Miss Tao, and to imagine what she had to go through, gave me an understanding of the world, and my place in it, that I never had before.”

He never saw Miss Tao again. He didn’t have to. She was the new “lens” through which he saw the world.

In 1990, with restrictions eased under Hanoi’s Open Door policy, Weigl began meeting with Vietnamese poets, who he found were also writing about the war. “They

soldiers do. Afterward, you can be friends. Our relationship was more about poetry than about the war. When you love poetry, it transforms how you relate to each other; it creates a bond.”

Part of the bond one feels with Weigl is that he gets you asking questions you don’t usually ask: How can people marginalize memories of napalm, carpet bombing, and Agent Orange and befriend a doubtlessly decent man, but one whose country’s army left behind perhaps 2 million dead Vietnamese? Is forgiveness, apart from the action of the spiritually awakened heart, a genetic predisposition with which some

Austin Seminary has prepared me to face the diversity of the world. We get to connect with people from different churches, people from the street, people in prison, people in hospitals, and people in and from foreign lands. Connecting to others is one of the first steps in the ministry of reconciliation.

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Continued from Page 40

They sound exhausted from fighting. The ‘enemy,’ from the U.S. point of view, was dehumanized as much as possible. This is a kind of reconciliation, a literary reconciliation.”

Weigl points out that his students at Lorain are working-class kids like himself. They understand that wars are fought by working-class people, and they themselves know or know of people who fought in Vietnam.

Lorain itself is a “veteran friendly” community college, with a veterans’ lounge that provides a private space to accommodate their private pain. Weigl is the adviser for the students’ veterans club on campus. His anti-war politics do not play well with Iraqi and Afghan war vets.

“Many of them are very gung-ho. I have been working with veterans for over 20 years, but it’s still difficult to adapt to guys like that. The politics comes up. Everything I do and think about is in some way related to my politics. But my job is to teach them writing. As a Buddhist, I also try to teach compassion. It’s important to remember that the level of atrocities in their wars has been really higher than ours. Consequently, the problems with PTSD are going to be worse.”

Weigl’s later poems bear the happier markings of hard-won serenity: “I think I’ll put my pencil down / so I can walk all through these slender winter shadows.” But in his early poems especially, I come across many lines that might be the spawn of PTSD. For example, this from “Mines,” a poem from *A Romance* (University of Pittsburgh Press), one of his first volumes:

*A Bouncing Betty comes up waist high—
cuts you in half.*

*One man’s legs were laid
Alongside him in the Dustoff,
he asked for a chairback, morphine,
he screamed he wanted to give
his eyes away, his kidneys,
his heart...*

The heart that was seeded in Lorain and lost in Vietnam, that was reborn in different ways in Middle America and in Southeast Asia, is the heart of poetry. ■

Robert Hirschfield is a New York City-based freelance writer.

Reviewed by Duane Shank

TELL ME A STORY

Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi,
by Amy-Jill Levine. HarperOne.

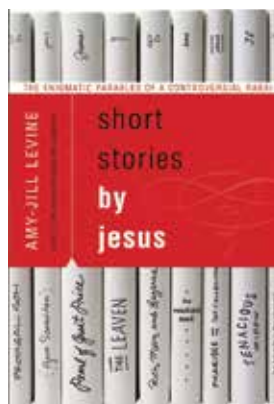
PREACHERS, politicians, and other public speakers know that a story is often the best way to get a point across to their listeners. In his itinerant ministry, Jesus was no exception. Some of his most important teaching was contained in stories—parables. Yet often we do not take them seriously enough to seek what he was really saying. Two thousand years of Christian theology has also obscured his original intent, often by considering them to be allegories rather than stories.

In that process, anti-Jewish stereotypes and prejudices have too often come to dominate the interpretation of the parables. Any villain is seen as representing Judaism, while the hero or victim represents the church—and, of course, in this framing God is on the side of the church. This often-unconscious

Anti-Jewish stereotypes and prejudices have too often come to dominate the interpretation of the parables.

bias affects how we read and understand the story and obscures Jesus’ message.

Professor Amy-Jill Levine, in *Short Stories by Jesus*, aims to correct that. As a Jewish New Testament scholar teaching at a Christian divinity school, she is uniquely situated to place Jesus and his teaching in their historical and cultural context. Jesus was a first-century Jew speaking to other first-century Jews. If we do not understand that starting point, we cannot understand Jesus or his stories. In an introduction not to be skipped, she points out that the parables often echo themes that appear elsewhere in Jesus’ teachings: economics, relationships, and, most important, prioritizing life



in expectation of the coming kingdom of God. To make his point, he uses common, everyday examples of real-life characters and situations his audience would recognize.

Levine looks at 11 parables, providing for each her literal translation, the historical and literary context, and a reading of what it might have suggested to its original audience and what it can say to us today. Along the way, there

are historical and theological explanations of the Samaritans, the Pharisees, Torah and Talmud, first-century Jewish culture, and more that help make the parables come alive.

Take, for example, the parable we know as “The Prodigal Son.” Much traditional Christian commentary sees it as an allegorical representation of the father as God, the older son as the Pharisees or all Jews, and the younger son as Christians who repent and find the grace of God. Rather, Levine suggests, see it as a story of broken family relationships that poses hard questions about reconciliation and wholeness. Those questions, and our response to them, can transform our own relationships as individuals and nations. That

transformation can ultimately lead to forgiveness and new ways of living together.

Similarly, the “Good Samaritan” can be seen as a practical application of what Jesus meant when he said to love our enemies, who may also be our neighbors. “Will we be able to bind up their wounds,” Levine asks, “rather than blow up their cities?” The story of a landowner paying workers who began at the end of the day the same amount as those who worked the entire day need not be made complicated via allegory. It rather raises economic questions of employer-employee relationships, a fair wage, and a living wage with parallels today.

In each case, the contextualization and

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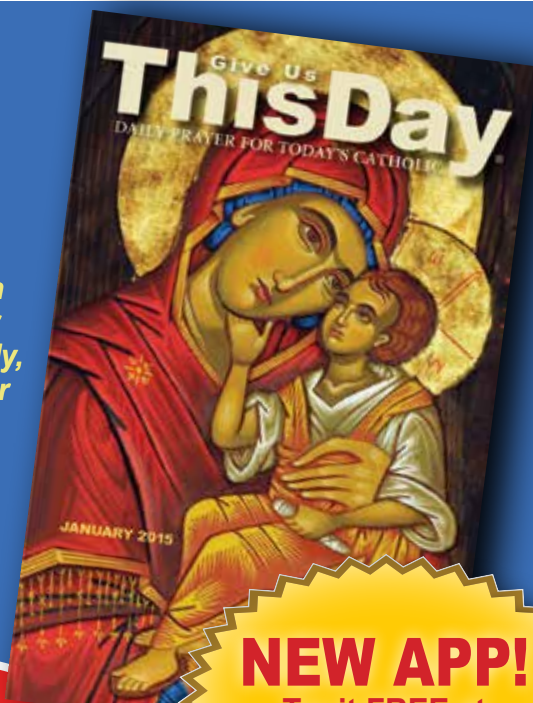
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explanation of the parables opens new doors for us to hear what Jesus was saying and to ponder what that means for our lives. Rather than seeing them simply as stories, or seeking allegorical symbolism, we are left with questions, often provocative and unexpected.

"The parables have provided me countless hours of inspiration, and conversation," Levine concludes. "They are pearls of Jewish wisdom. If we hear them in their original contexts, and if we avoid the anti-Jewish interpretation that frequently deforms them, they gleam with a shine that cannot be hidden." ■

Duane Shank is a writer living in Washington, D.C.

Reviewed by Lisa Caton

RECHARTING OUR COURSE

How Maps Change Things: A Conversation about the Maps We Choose and the World We Want, by Ward L. Kaiser. Woodlake.

USERS OF MAPS—that's all of us—may suppose that what we see is factual, accurate, bias-free. Of course location, distance, elevation, and comparative importance are reliably shown!

Not so fast, says social activist and pastor Ward L. Kaiser. A map may be "right" in some ways but still dangerous to the way we live in the world.

Why? Because maps are layered with meaning. Surprisingly, their most important messages may lie beneath the surface. In his full-color book *How Maps Change Things*, Kaiser helps the reader to dig in and discover some of those hidden, mind-bending messages.

As a college chaplain I am acutely, sometimes painfully, aware of the often-hidden narratives and symbols that define us as individuals and as a culture. This book has helped me analyze how maps—an increasingly pervasive form of symbolic messaging and storytelling in our time—connect us to power and privilege or consign us to society's also-rans.

Examples make the case: An intriguing

regional map developed for schools in Cuba raises the question of how this image contributes to that nation's distorted view of the U.S. A secret map of Iraq drawn up in Washington so shifted our perception of that country that it lubricated the decision by the U.S. and other Western powers to go to war there. Several of the most popular maps of the world support a Eurocentric or North America-centered worldview, aggrandizing "our" place in the world and downplaying the importance of developing nations.

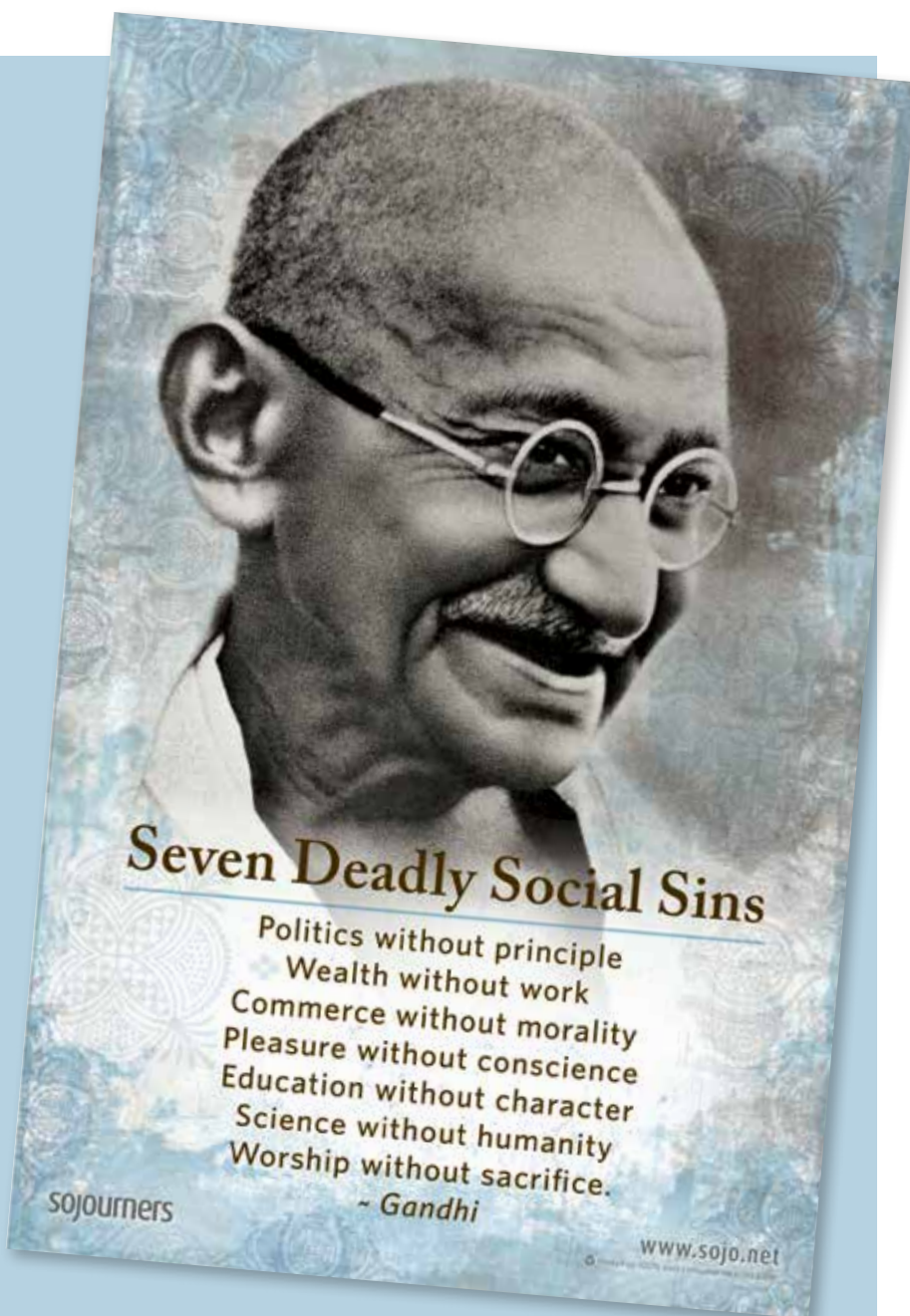
Kaiser's point: Maps are always selective, often biased, constantly nudging us to see, think, and behave in particular ways. We shape maps; equally important, they shape us. Like the faith we hold, maps powerfully influence how we live in the world. And maps may work with our faith or against it.

Kaiser compares the most widely recognized world map, the Mercator, to the Peters Projection, one of several equal-area projections (he published the first English language version of the Peters map in North America in 1983). A map like the Peters, by replacing Northern Hemisphere self-importance and undervalued tropics with a more-accurate presentation of relative size, offers us far more than minor cartographic modification: It shifts our human mindset in the direction of fairness toward the whole human race.

How Maps Change Things, then, takes us well beyond squiggles on a screen or sheet of paper. As the subtitle suggests, it points us toward seeking "the world we want." Kaiser, who has wide experience in church leadership in the U.S., Canada, and overseas, is passionate about the faith-and-ethics dimension of mapping. "We dare not let this be seen as just a technical issue," Kaiser commented in an interview. "It's at heart an issue of justice. It's a question that now confronts Christians everywhere as we seek to live out God's call to faithfulness and fairness."

I encourage anyone committed to the ways of peace and of justice to get a copy of this book, read and enjoy it, and even, using the group guidance provided, set up a study and action program. It can only help us all. ■

Lisa Caton, an Episcopal priest in the diocese of New Jersey, is chaplain at The College of New Jersey and chair of the Diocesan Millennium Development Goals Task Force.



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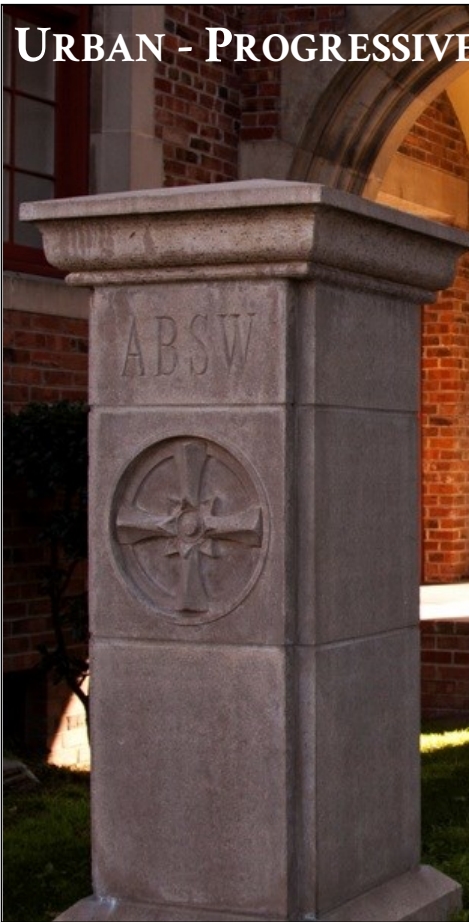
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Haiti After the Quake

Continued from Page 21

them women—received not only money, but also entrepreneurial training and support in how to run a business.

“Our hope in the [microloan] program was to create real jobs for people,” Moore explained, “to enable people to earn money to live on and build for the future.” Overall, he said, the program was “definitely a success” that impacted hundreds of lives in positive ways.

For Moore and his staff, the main task over the final months of 2014 was closing down the reconstruction office. “We accomplished all the goals we set five years ago” regarding immediate and medium-term responses to the earthquake, Moore said. Now, despite some sadness at seeing the end of successful programs like the microloans, because they “touched a lot of lives,” he said the organization was returning to what it’s done for 45 years: working with vulnerable children. “We’re going back to what we’re good at: child development.”

Moore was asked why he does this work, in some of the poorest places on the planet. “Because Jesus told me to; because of the call God put on my life: What we do to the least of these, we do unto Jesus,” Moore said. “We honor God by how we treat the poor. That’s important not only now, but eternally.” Moore sees hope in the changes he’s seen in Haiti. “Five years ago, Haiti was literally a disaster zone,” he said. “I see progress.”

But Moore is well aware that Haiti has many challenges that will last far beyond disaster response. If there’s a secret to Compassion’s success in Haiti—and it’s clear that Haiti is not an easy place to succeed—the crucial element might be found in the group’s partnership with local churches. Other groups have come into the country, with the best of intentions, and tried to impose what they think Haiti needs. Compassion Haiti is run by Haitians.

That’s no guarantee that everything will run smoothly, or even with perfect integrity. “Some people in the church are corrupt,” Moore said, “but in the church it’s frowned upon.” And the church is an institution that exists, even in the poorest communities. If they can be better equipped to “bring hope to a generation,” Moore said, that’s a foundation upon which a future can be built. ■

Jim Rice, editor of Sojourners magazine, traveled to Haiti in August as part of a media delegation sponsored by Compassion International.

The Pope and Pandora's Box

JOURNALIST Elisabetta Piqué was reporting for Argentina's *La Nacion* from a conflict zone in Gaza when her phone rang. On the line was her friend, Padre Jorge. He knew Piqué, a war correspondent, was somewhere bombs were falling. He wanted to pray with her.

Piqué had known Argentina's Catholic Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio since 2001. "He knew me first as a war correspondent," Piqué told me when we met on a warm October afternoon in the courtyard of Hotel Helix in Washington, D.C. An affectionate friendship developed. Bergoglio even baptized her two children. Her new book, *Pope Francis: Life and Revolution*, investigates the history, passions, mistakes, humility, courage, and spiritual maturity of the man her friend has become.

In the rush to publish biographies of the new pope, some (see Paul Valley's *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots*) tout Bergoglio's

'He is a person who has been consistent all his life.'

conversion from careful, benevolent, autocrat to radical, somewhat careless, lover of the poor. Piqué categorically challenges this portrayal. "He is a person who has been consistent all his life," she says, "not somebody that suddenly became like that now. The theories that he had a conversion are totally nonsense and without any basis. He was always a sensitive person toward suffering."

Piqué is also quick to note that hers is an unauthorized biography. "I never wanted to involve him because there are chapters where I say things that maybe it's better that he's not involved with. I speak about his clashes with some sectors [of the Jesuits] and also the Vatican. He didn't read before it was published."



Author
Elisabetta Piqué

In fact, Piqué's first-person voice and investigative acumen (along with a crackerjack team of researcher-journalists—"all women, of course," Piqué notes with a smile) make *Life and Revolution* read like a fast-paced novel. She covers the difficult years when Bergoglio was exiled by his Jesuit superiors; the complicated subterfuge required during Argentina's horrific Dirty War; other cardinals accusing Bergoglio "of not defending doctrine, of making pastoral gestures that are too daring."

"I get very crazy when people say, 'Ah, they are just gestures,'" says Piqué. "No! They are not gestures; these are facts," referring to his reform of the Roman curia, transparency in the Vatican bank, and prosecution of child molesters. "Here we have someone who is changing things, who is changing the history of the church. He had a mandate from the conclave to clean things up—so he's doing a cleanup of all these scandals."

However, some, like U.S. Cardinal Burke, corral money and political power to advance an opposition against Pope Francis' leadership. Others disparage him as not a "real intellectual," ignoring his Jesuit education and that he taught

psychology, literature, and theology. Even friends caution him against opening Pandora's box by encouraging discussion on gay and lesbian Catholics, heterosexuals who are divorced or remarried, contraception, and more.

"We have a pope that walked the streets, that got mud in his shoes," says Piqué, "and he knows perfectly well that the family is in crisis."

"After the synod on the family, I did an interview with Victor Manuel Fernandez, an archbishop and theologian who is very close to Pope Francis. I asked him about the critics who are worried about Pandora's box. He told me, 'If we don't open Pandora's box, what is one to do but hide the dirt under the carpet, stick your head in a hole like ostriches, move ourselves increasingly further from the sensibilities of our people, just to be happy because a small group applauds and congratulates us?' I was very moved by this."

The final chapter of *Life and Revolution* lays out Francis' direction: greater collegiality, dismantling clericalism, and elevating the role of women and laypeople in church leadership. The church must allow the Holy Spirit to transform the proclamation of good news away from doctrinal transmission into a more missionary mode, focused on essentials. "We have to find a new balance," Pope Francis said, "otherwise even the moral edifice of the church is likely to fall like a house of cards." When Pandora's box was opened, many ills flew out—but one thing was left at the bottom: the spirit called hope. ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet. She and Lani Prunés, who contributed to this article, interviewed Elisabetta Piqué in late 2014.



On the Outskirts of Heaven

THE LAST SUNDAY IN FEBRUARY is the first Sunday of Lent. We are asked to prepare for Lent by searching our souls and repenting of our misdeeds in order to walk with Jesus on his road to the cross. After writing the final reflections below, I felt unfinished. Repentance is easy to talk about but exceedingly hard to do. We justify and excuse our actions when we've hurt a friend or made a bad choice. It's usually someone else's fault anyhow—they started it!

The most striking example of human resistance to repentance I've ever read was in C.S. Lewis' little book *The Great Divorce*. The "divorce" is the huge gap between heaven and hell. Hell is not fiery but filled with people who can't get along with each other and keep moving further apart in the darkness. Eventually, a few make their way to a bus stop where they get a ride to the outskirts of heaven. There everyone is met by someone from their past they'd rather not meet, and who begs them to repent, make restitution, or whatever is necessary to enjoy a joyful eternity of loving relationships. For almost all of them, it's not worth it. They

fear losing the bit of ego they have left. They'd rather go back to hell than repent and be reconciled with someone they love to hate.

No wonder repenting is the first step to entering the kingdom of God!



Reta Halteman Finger, co-author of *Creating a Scene in Corinth: A Simulation*, taught Bible at Messiah College in Grantham, Pa., and writes a Bible study blog at www.eewc.com/RetasReflections.

[FEBRUARY 1]

Meeting God in Prophets

Deuteronomy 18:15-20; Psalm 111; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28

ONE FEBRUARY, during my college years, a professor remarked that this month is the hardest to get through. Ice has turned to slush and we're tired of winter, but spring is (or used to be) weeks away. Years later in Chicago, my husband and I took our children to a nearby

or consulting the sorcerers, soothsayers, and psychics used by other nations. The people will not find YHWH through these methods.

On the other hand, the Hebrew people fear a direct encounter with the living God. "If I hear the voice of the Lord my God any more ... I will die," they say in verse 16. So Moses promises human conduits of God's voice—prophets who speak in the name of YHWH. Listen only to these

special people. Those who speak in the name of other gods will die.

Judging by Israelite history, the plural "prophets" makes more sense, as the NRSV footnotes suggest. However, after the coming of Jesus, both Peter and Stephen (in Acts 3:22 and 7:37) refer to him as the prophet (singular) who is like Moses.

In Mark 1:21-28, Jesus' first public action demonstrates his prophetic power and wisdom by banishing an evil spirit inhabiting a man and refusing to allow it to identify him. In 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Paul recognizes the fears that newly converted believers in a polytheistic culture still have of "so-called

gods," but he asserts God's oneness and Jesus' lordship over all other powers.

[FEBRUARY 8]

Grasshoppers or Humans?

Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c;
1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

THE ASTRONAUTS who circle the Earth in the International Space Station have a view of the Earth none of the rest of us will ever see firsthand. The first photos of Earth beamed back from space confronted us with both the wonder and the fragility of our little blue planet. Neither Isaiah nor the psalmist ever saw such a photo, but what they say sounds as if they had. In his mind's eye, Isaiah sees God sitting "above the circle of the Earth," where "its inhabitants are like grasshoppers." Space itself is stretched out "like a curtain" (verse 22). The Lord of Psalm 147 binds up the wounds of the brokenhearted and at the same time numbers and names all the stars!

But our New Testament texts portray two human beings who walk or trudge upon small patches of our spinning Earth, bringing good news to those who can hear it. Though Jesus is endowed with God's Spirit (see Mark 1:9-11), there are no fireworks, just a crowd of sick and tortured people asking for help. Day after day, only prayer will get him through (1:35).

Jesus' apostle, Paul, is in a similar situation, but without the miracles. Throughout 1 Corinthians 9, Paul argues that, though he has a right to be supported financially for his preaching, he refuses it and instead performs lower-class manual labor (Acts 18:3). This money would come from the elite patrons of his house churches, who would consequently expect him to honor *them* more than the low-income laborers and slaves who make up the majority of believers. This Paul refuses to do, despite the patrons' resistance. He insists that he must become weak and poor—become even a slave—in order to bring good news to those in such situations (see 1 Corinthians 9:22).

Would that we had more religious and political leaders so willing to identify with the poor of today's world.

Paul understood well the irony of the cross as the way to glorification.

nature preserve in late February to look for signs of spring. There they were—little green shoots hidden under layers of dead leaves and snow puddles. Tiny manifestations of spring in the dead of winter.

On the church calendar, Epiphany refers to "a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity." Psalm 111 declares that YHWH's presence is made visible by the ability to call out a people from the nations and make an everlasting covenant with them. But our other readings struggle with questions about how to interpret the signs we do see. In the paragraph before Deuteronomy 18:15-20, Moses forbids sacrificing children

[FEBRUARY 15]

Shame and Glory

2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6;
2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

SINCE I WAS a child, I have known the story in 2 Kings of Elijah's journey to heaven in a chariot of fire, mainly through pictures in Bible storybooks. Reading it now, with its repetition of movement from place to place and its suspension of natural law, the first word that comes to mind is "bizarre"! Perhaps the main point in its original context was the persistence of Elisha to follow in the footsteps of his wonder-working master.

But to the author of Mark's gospel, the presence of never-dying Elijah conversing with Jesus made perfect sense. Perhaps he alone could stand with Moses, the supreme prophet of Israel, to meet the "prophet like Moses" who was promised in Deuteronomy 18:15. Whatever happened on that mountain, it was full of symbolism to the disciples steeped in their Israelite history.

The word "transfigure" comes to us from the King James Bible. The Greek original is *metamorphoō*, which simply refers to a "change of appearance," like a tadpole metamorphosing into a frog. Today we might call transfiguration "shape-shifting"!

We must not overlook the topographical setting for this shape-shifting event—on a mountain, the place where heaven meets earth and where Moses received the Torah. The literary setting likewise contributes to both its majesty and its irony. It follows Jesus' first prediction to the disciples that he will be rejected, shamed, and killed by their religious leaders (see Mark 8:31). Small wonder that Transfiguration Sunday precedes the beginning of Lent!

In light of the juxtaposition of shame and glory in Mark, Paul's comment in 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 says it well: The gospel is veiled to those who are perishing, but to us it is "the good news of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (verse 4). Missionary Paul understood well the irony of the cross as the way to glorification.

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

[FEBRUARY 22]

Come to the Mercy Seat

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10;
1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

AS LENT BEGINS, our readings circle around the themes of repentance for sin, water as a symbol of baptism and cleansing, and the suffering necessary for salvation.

Psalm 25 presents a picture of a prodigal son or daughter bowing before the mercy seat of YHWH. Struggling against his or her own folly, battered by critics and enemies, the penitent begs for mercy and pardon. "Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me" (verse 7).

Centuries later, John the Baptist provided a ritual of cleansing for those who wished to repent and live a different life (Mark 1:4-5). As noted in the same reading last month, Jesus identified so deeply with our human condition that he was also baptized by John. Though the Spirit named him a beloved Son at that time, the Spirit also drove him into the desert to figure out his particular mission. Proclaiming the coming kingdom of God, his message echoed Psalm 25: Repent!

The text in 1 Peter 3 ties us to Noah's flood and the ark of salvation. Biblical writers often used typology to communicate theology. Those who ridiculed Noah and ignored God's warnings perished. (The strange idea of Jesus preaching to "spirits in prison" probably harks back to the inter-testamental apocalyptic writing of 1 Enoch, where Enoch visits evil spirits and fallen angels.) The flood story is repeating itself today, as scientists warn of climate change amid the scoffing of climate-change deniers.

Setting aside its puzzles, the 1 Peter text is especially poignant. Writing to marginalized immigrants and refugees, Peter acknowledges that their faithfulness to Jesus has caused suffering. But he asks them to endure without retaliation, just as Jesus suffered. Baptism is the outward sign of their submission to the One who now sits at God's hand and has ultimate authority over all their oppressors. ■

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to talk
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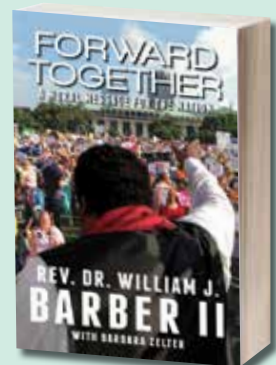
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Meet the New Boss (looks familiar)

IN MID-JANUARY, the gavel of power will change hands in the U.S. Senate. Mitch McConnell, in a touching act of cross-party reconciliation, will reach across the aisle and forcefully pry the symbol of legislative authority from the desperate grip of Harry Reid. Although the outgoing majority leader said after the midterms, "I have been

reminded that the true power of incumbency is simply outliving everybody else.

You would think that the many benefits of longevity would include a lifetime of wisdom but, for these two men, sitting long at the feast of reason is no guarantee of peckishness. (Sorry. My router is down and I've been reading 19th-century English literature instead of streaming videos of cute animals. It's the baby kangaroos I miss the most.)

BUT SUCH IS the will of the public, that power be passed from one bitter old white guy to another, reflecting the primary demographic of last year's midterms: namely, bitter old white guys. It was the worst voter turnout in 72 years, but these guys showed up in droves. (Or was it in pickups?)

I can comment on this without being accused of ageism because I, too, am an old white guy, with every reason to share the bitterness of my brethren: My teeth are long, and my memory is short, and it takes longer to pee. Plus, my memory is short. Most of the cast of *Gilligan's Island* has passed away, leaving us castaways on our own island of increasing irrelevance. In a world of millennials, we are the centennials, our strength ebbing with every passing day.

We've expanded our belts but lowered our expectations. We get frequent checkups but can't do a chin-up. We finally get a smart phone, but then sit on it by mistake and butt-dial a stranger, one whose

life is more interesting than ours. And then he hangs up.

We struggle with the relentless pace of change. Even a public restroom, of all things, has become a cruel cacophony of unpredictability, with its motion-sensing faucets and spontaneous soap dispensers, not to mention the powerful air driers that roar like passing freight trains. We stand at the sink frozen with apprehension, afraid to move lest we set off another frightful hygienic device. If this is modernity, we want no part.

So we drive to the nearest polling place and vote against it. (We drive slowly, as old people do, because nowadays you can't even trust your airbag. Apparently, it may contain sharp bits of metal. You survive the crash but no longer photograph well.)

We cling to our one consolation, that the elderly are no longer tossed off the back of the sledge when the tribe moves to more-fertile lands (a marked disappointment to the wolf pack following a short distance behind).

ON THE PLUS side, we're living much longer. Which perfectly suits our politicians, who stubbornly age in place, bickering endlessly and requiring constant and expensive medical care. Only when they are ready will they do the honorable thing and step aside for younger people with fresh energy and new ideas. Like, people in their late 60s. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

From one grim-faced, aging, white guy to another.

able to strike a compromise with my Republican colleagues, and I'm ready to do it again," Reid later clarified that what he meant was the compromise he would strike would be across the knuckles.

After warding off repeated blows, however, McConnell will be the new leader of the Senate, a massive change in political power that will go virtually unnoticed to the public, since he and Reid are both grim-faced, elderly white men whose rare smiles cause parents to cover their children's eyes and bring their pets indoors.

Indistinguishable in their sour demeanors, they are like brothers separated at birth: two joyless Caucasian babies muttering in their hospital cribs, already soured by the knowledge their lives will be spent in fruitless conflict, the only bright spot being they'll have comfortable leather seating at work.

Both men are well into their seventh decade, with most of their adulthood spent in politics, another

Ken Davis

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